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The Diary of a
COMMUNIST UNDERGRADUATE

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The Diary of a Communist Schoolboy

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"I feel as if I had at last got some authentic news out of Bolshevik Russia. It is a new feeling to me; for hitherto I have found the tidings brought by travellers very unconvincing. . . . My bulletin is Ognyov's *The Diary of a Communist Schoolboy*. . . . His remarkable book is a novel—at any rate, it is fiction. But it has all the characteristics of fundamental truth to life. . . . I have not picked plums out of the book. Or, if I have, the book is simply all plums. It is what I call an important book. But, unlike some important books, it is continually interesting."—ARNOLD BENNETT, in *The Evening Standard*.

"Reads like a headmaster's nightmare."—*Sunday Expresss*.

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"'N. Ognyov' has done for the Russian schoolboy what Mr. Eden Phillpotts, in *The Human Boy*, did for the British. The Russian boy is, if anything, the more human of the two."—*Manchester Guardian*.

"An extraordinary document, and one that gives some vivid sidelights on the new Russia . . . . a book not to be missed."—*The Queen*.

N. OGNYOV pseud of
M. Khail Grigor'evich Rozanov

The Diary of a Communist Undergraduate

Translated from the Russian
with an introduction
by
ALEXANDER WERTH

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INTRODUCTION

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The Russian Revolution has often been described as the greatest event of the present century—greater, indeed, than the war. In a sense this is true. The war was a senseless business, and, even if it did aim at " making the world safe for Democracy," the idea came as an afterthought, and was certainly not in the minds of those who arranged or took part in that formidable butchery.

It has resulted in a few more or less important changes in the political face of Europe ; it has given the world a general feeling of economic and financial discomfort, and has consequently led people to reconsider the question of international relations ; but, after all, the war itself was only a great battle of armies, navies, and economic forces, and not a battle of ideas ; and it really didn't raise any political or economic problems as fundamental as those raised by the Russian Revolution. Democracy and Capitalism still hold their own, and, although Democracy has won over a few countries and has lost a few others, the general social mentality of Europe has not undergone any very drastic changes.

But if the war was mainly accidental, the Russian Revolution was mainly deliberate, and

was, above all, a movement of *ideas*. It has not shaken the world as much as the French Revolution did, or as the Russian revolutionaries would perhaps like to believe, but it has—both positively and negatively—made the greatest contribution of the present century to the social, political, and economic experience of the human race. It started out by declaring war on Capitalism, on Democracy, on property, on money—in short, on the whole basis of European civilisation. No man or woman—except those leading a purely vegetable existence—could refrain from watching Russia with the keenest interest, and from trying to understand how this revolutionary order was going to work out in practice, and for a time, indeed, it was more than a purely academic concern. The Communists had promised to spread their doctrine all over the world, and, for a time, Red Bogey was a very real person, sitting on many a man's doorstep, waiting to knock him down with his hammer and to cut his throat with his sickle. And, though Red Bogey has ceased to be the terrible fellow he once was, the interest in his home country has remained as vital as ever, one of the reasons being that people want to discover the causes of his sudden tameness.

"What's happening in Russia?" is the question that has been and is still being asked even by those who never were in the least

interested in Russia *as a country*. The papers do their best to enlighten their readers on the "political situation," and almost every week we have some new book by someone who has taken a ten days' trip to Moscow, and who is at last going to tell us "the truth about Russia." The fact that the English, French, or German gentleman doesn't know a word of Russian and has seen no more of Russia than a gala show at the State Opera (for some obscure reason it's always a *gala* show), and has perhaps never even written an article in his life, doesn't deter him from his intention of telling his fellow-Europeans the last word about the Soviet State.

As information, these "last words" are hardly worth the ink with which they are written, and the money spent on the ticket and on tipping the Bolshevik waiters at the Moscow hotel has been wasted—because, in almost every case, the "last word" could have been written without going to Russia.

The point is that all these travellers—and to a large extent the more keen-eyed journalists too—have, for obvious and really quite legitimate reasons, always treated the Russian Revolution as a political problem, and not as a human drama. Hence the conflicting evidence of these books ; the tone of each book depends entirely on the author's personal preferences, and the moral is not tagged on to the story, but the story tagged on to the moral.

But what's the good of blaming foreign journalists for giving a distorted view of Soviet Russia, when the professional Russian journalists do exactly the same thing? In fact, where the one does it ignorantly,[1] the other does it deliberately, and with a full consciousness of his bias. But such is the function of the official Press in Russia—and there is no Press but the official one.

The State monopoly of the Press is one of the most important features of the Soviet régime—and a fact which has had a very considerable influence on the literature of the last five or six years. The connection between the two doesn't seem quite clear at first ; but it is really quite simple. Anyone who knows anything about Soviet newspapers knows that all the information, and especially all the editorial matter, is presented in a strictly " ideological " way. As a result, there is no room in these papers for any non-political form of writing, let alone purely literary journalism, which held such a large place in the pre-revolutionary Russian Press. Nor does the official Press encourage " pure reporting " or objective journalism dealing with the more intimate facts of Soviet life and institutions.

[1] There are, of course, a few exceptions to the general rule of Moscow correspondents. For instance, we have lately had some very interesting non-political messages, with a " human interest," from the admirably informed Moscow correspondent of the *Observer*.

The result is this : a great deal of the existing journalistic energy has drifted into literature ; Russian literature is more concerned with the social problems of everyday reality—with the detailed study of schools, universities, industry, and government offices than literature in any democratic country ; and, curiously enough, what the journalist is not allowed to say in three hundred words, the author is allowed to say in sixty thousand. Though his message may carry as much weight as the journalist's would, it is presented in a diluted form, and, moreover, has got to be tolerated—in the name of Art. Any form of fiction in Russia is, in fact, very wisely labelled " artistic literature."

As a result, modern Russian literature, though often much more journalistic than " artistic," is an invaluable source of direct information about the actual everyday conditions in Soviet Russia. In most cases this reality is handled from a political angle—which is only natural in a society that is still in a state of flux—but the whole emphasis is laid, not on the political principles involved, but on their practical working and, above all, on the psychological reactions they produce in the minds of the Russians of to-day. That is something which the official Press overlooks, and which is simply beyond the ken of all those tourists who tell " the truth " about Russia.

Ognyov's *Diary of Kostya Riabtsov*, which falls into two parts—*The Diary of a Communist Schoolboy*, which was published in English last spring, and the present volume—is one of the most outstanding examples of this modern form of psychological fiction, which is half-art, half-journalism.

The *Communist Schoolboy* had a remarkable success both in Russia and abroad—and it is not to be wondered at. With considerable literary skill, and with a full command of his subject, Ognyov gave an intimate picture of easily the most vital problem of Soviet Russia—her young generation, in whose hands the fate of the Revolution will ultimately be placed. In the *Schoolboy* we were given a shrewd picture of proletarian schoolboy mentality during the first few years following the anarchy and the Civil War. There were many grotesque things about the school : there was a deplorable lack of discipline ; the actual education, under the Dalton Plan, didn't seem to go too well ; the economic conditions were miserable ; the standard of sexual morality extremely low—but there was something magnificent in the way in which the children — and especially Kostya Riabtsov himself — accepted wholeheartedly the new world, and felt that they were living in a great though difficult age, which would some day be entrusted to their keeping. Their acceptance of Leninist slogans, and their

constant urge to handle every fact of life " from the ideological standpoint," was not only childish, but also beautiful in the way that all true faith is beautiful. And the book ends on a note of triumph—" Long live our Outpost ! "

It is with this strong faith in the greatness of the Revolution that the young boys and girls are sent out into life. At school Kostya Riabtsov was the ideal young Communist, earnest and full of real enthusiasm, and the author did well to choose *him*, and not any of his weaker schoolmates, for his diarist, and to show how the contact with life outside the school was going to affect Kostya, who, with all his human weaknesses, is the best possible specimen of a revolutionary youth.

The moment he leaves his Dalton laboratory he begins to see that life isn't quite as simple a matter as he imagined, and much of it scarcely fits into his narrow ideology at all.

When his father dies, he suddenly realises that

> It's quite a different thing when someone you are fond of is dying. You can't very well stand by his bedside and argue that it is a matter that will dissolve according to such and such a process.

After his father dies, and he is reduced to sleeping on the Embankment (or its Russian equivalent), he finds it very puzzling that such

a thing should happen to a good Communist, while the N.E.P. class spend their evenings eating and drinking and dancing the foxtrot.

At times he gets very discouraged, and, when particularly hungry, he doesn't even mind getting a meal off a Nepman—though he does it in strict accordance with Communist sophistry :

> Although I have been a bit suspicious of Korsuntsev for the past few weeks, I don't think he has really done anything anti-proletarian. . . . So when he asked me to dinner I saw nothing wrong in it, and went. Of course, Korsuntsev is ideologically somewhat inconsistent, and, strictly speaking, his views are tainted with a petty-bourgeois spirit, but, after all, one has to study this spirit before starting a fight against it.

What he wanted, of course, was a meal, and not an opportunity to study the bourgeois spirit, but, for all that, his sophistry may have been unintentional.

But gradually he begins to realise the hard lot of the honest Communist, and when he gets a chance of cheating a bourgeois he does it, and, alas ! finds that this is the only possible way for a good Communist student to obtain a bed and breakfast in the U.S.S.R. A much less sublime finale than " Long live our Outpost ! "

Except for a few people who appear quite incidentally in the *Undergraduate* (Zin-Palna,

Aleshka Cheekin, Zoya Travnikova), there are only three characters who play a part in both *Diaries*—Vanka Petukhov, Sylva, and Nikpetozh.

Vanka Petukhov who formerly sold cigarettes in the street, is now seen as the leading spirit of Socialist activity among the workers of the *Lux* factory. He is all energy, he is the model proletarian type—who rules his fellow-workers not with bureaucratic but personal authority, and who, in order to get results, has to behave like a bully and an autocrat and "like a regular Chamberlain," as Kostya remarks on one occasion. A striking example of the survival of the fittest and of personal leadership in a Communist society.

All the other characters in the book are new: they belong to that outside world, the very existence of which Kostya hardly suspected while he was still at school.

We have that puzzling N.E.P. class, represented by Korsuntsev, his Uncle Peresvet, Zizi, and his other "foxtrot girls," and the effect this new bourgeoisie has on the hundred-per-cent. Communist Kostya is one of the most significant—and at times amusing—things in the book. The story of the foxtrot party is a splendid piece of broad but genuine humour. No less important from the standpoint of information is Ognyov's description of the students' hostels. It is a favourite subject with

present-day Russian writers, and Lidin, Panteleimon Romanov, Malashkin, and others have, indeed, painted the real state of affairs in much more gruesome colours than Ognyov. But, although Ognyov's descriptions are chaste and modest as compared with Romanov's piquant stories, the Bull, and Korsuntsev, and the Petrov couple give the reader a clear enough idea of the rather strange moral code prevailing in those hostels. It must, however, be admitted that, while every episode in the *Schoolboy* sounded not only probable but genuine, there are two in the *Undergraduate* which give one the impression of having been manufactured by the author. Thus the Shahov episode strikes one as being rather far-fetched, and one feels as though the author had merely wanted to show how Kostya *would* have acted under such circumstances.

Still less plausible is the Partisan episode—which is no more than a feeble variation on the famous Russian literary theme of " disillusionment after the heroic years of the Civil War." Ognyov was ill-advised to tackle a subject which had already been handled with such mastery and insight in Leonid Leonov's *Thief*.

On the whole, the *Undergraduate* forms an almost independent work. The very nature of the *Schoolboy* and the *Undergraduate* makes them independent of each other. In the latter,

Riabtsov is placed in surroundings entirely different from those in which we saw him in the earlier volume, and the book illustrates quite a new side of Soviet life.

The reader who has not read the *Schoolboy* would, however, be well advised to do so ; it would give him a more complete understanding of not only the diarist himself, but also of Sylva, his feminine counterpart, and especially of Nikpetozh (*Nik*olai *Pet*rovich *Ozh*egov), who figures prominently in both books.

The second *Diary* clearly reveals the mental tragedy of this member of the old *intelligentsia* —the tragedy which was only very faintly suggested in the *Schoolboy*. We now find why this excellent teacher, who was once so popular with all his little Bolshevik pupils, is really an unhappy man : it is because he feels lost in the new world. He feels an outsider. And only in the very end is he saved from despair by the sudden discovery that the Soviet system is no more than a very valuable experience in the growth of that greater thing called—Russia.

" Onward, dear Russia, onward ! " he whispers to himself. " Strange, isn't it ? "

It is. And yet the real truth may ultimately lie in this, and not in "Long live our Communist Outpost ! " Probably it does.

ALEXANDER WERTH.

LONDON,
December 19, 1928.

BOOK I

BOOK I

June 12, 1925 :

I have just come back to town from the party at Comrade Mihalsky's house. It lasted for two and a half days, and was arranged to celebrate our completion of the second-grade school.

We are all *abiturients*[1] now, and so quite different from what we were at school. All the same, we aren't students yet.

What are we then? It's an interesting question, and I'll try to analyse it. Here some perfectly natural thoughts enter my head : what am I going to be, i.e. what faculty shall I choose, and, secondly, how can I get into the University?

Under the old conditions, it was all perfectly simple. A fellow would be told by his father or mother : Be a soldier or a priest or a White Guard, and he would do just as he was told. And, in the same way, a daughter would become a shop girl or get married. Nowadays one's got to decide everything for one's self—and that is very difficult.

As for getting into the University, the important thing is not only to pass, but to get a

[1] An *abiturient*—the term is borrowed from the German—is one who has completed his studies at the secondary school, but has not yet entered a University.

scholarship as well. I'm all right in this respect, but the others seem to be in a mess.

Our school is only entitled to three stipends in addition to the two granted by the fathers' trade unions and the one granted by the Alliance of Communist Youth. That is all. Twenty-six fellows must, therefore, go without. We talked a great deal about it at Mihalsky's ; but our talks don't seem to have got us anywhere. Under the Tsar, the children of workers and peasants and poor people in general never got into Universities at all ; these were reserved for the children of the bourgeois, priests, and White Guards. And, if there were any competitive exams., it all depended on who could pay most. In this way the Universities were only frequented by the children of the aristocracy, the plutocracy, the bureaucracy, and the bourgeocracy.

There was a fellow from our group at the party called Victor Shahov, who kept hanging round me all the time. At first I didn't take any notice of him. He's quite an uninteresting fellow, except that he writes poetry ; on the whole, he looks jaded and wobbly. Perhaps it is because he's in love with Stasya Velipolsky. Shahov never plays football, but sometimes he takes it into his head, for no apparent reason, to rush right into the thick of the game, trying to kick the ball with his long and clumsy legs. The players try to push him out, but he doesn't

seem to mind. Finally they lose their temper completely and knock him about till he's black and blue ; only then will he get out and take on that queer dumb look of his. Or else he will walk about the hall between classes, speaking to no one, and then suddenly he will throw himself at one of the boys and try to knock him off his feet. After that he'll walk on quietly as though nothing had happened. Of course, the fellow he has knocked down will run after him and hand him out a Red Army ration—but it's like water off a duck's back. When we spoke to Zin-Palna about it, she usually laughed, and said : " He's a poet." So they called him at school " Poet Don't-know-it." Why " Don't-know-it" no one could explain, but that's always the way with nicknames ; even the silliest one will stick. Still, during the last two years Shahov wasn't called any nicknames ; it was the other way round—people respected him for some poems which he was said to have sent to a magazine and which had been accepted and printed. I don't know what kind of poems they were. And, besides—and that was probably the main reason why people began to respect him—Shahov used to read papers to us. He was a non-party man, and not a young Communist at all ; all the same, his papers were always amazing. You could ask him to give a paper on any subject under the sun, and he would always come through with flying colours.

Well, this Shahov fellow hung around me all the time, and got so much on my nerves that I finally asked him what he wanted.

" You go to hell ! " Shahov said.

Here some of the girls called me away—to go out in a boat, I believe—and I forgot about Shahov.

At night, as we were all going to bed (we slept in the hay-barn adjoining Mihalsky's house) I heard someone say :

" What faculty are you choosing, Shahov ? "

" Go to hell ! "

" But I'm asking you as a friend."

" Go to hell all the same."

The next morning when we were bathing in the pond, Shahov, all naked, came up to me and said :

" I want you to do something for me. Do it if you like ; if you don't, you can go to hell ! "

" Look here, Shahov," I replied. " We've both gone through the secondary school and all that sort of thing, and it's funny you can't find any other expression. Of course, I'll do anything you want me to do, but——"

" Idiot ! " Shahov suddenly growled to himself, jumped into the pond, and swam away.

" What's wrong with him ? " I asked Volodka Schmerz, who was standing near by.

" I'm not sure," he said. " Maybe it's because he can't get into the University, but most

likely it is Stasya Velipolsky. You know, of course, that she's——"

"Look here, Schmerz," I interrupted him. "I've given you more than one hiding in the past, and I don't suppose you want any more *Kopf-schmerz*——"

"No, no, I don't," said Volodka, hurriedly getting into the water. *Kopf-schmerz* is the German for pushing one's face in, and that is what we always say to Volodka when he starts gossiping. But Shahov certainly is a queer bird ; he's incomplete, somehow.

June 14 :

I went to see Vanka Petukhov at the factory, and found Nikpetozh working there as a club lecturer in sociology.

"Well," I said to Vanka, "that must be grand for you." "Not too grand, I'm afraid," said Vanka. "Why not? Isn't he a good fellow?" "He may be quite a good fellow from your school standpoint ; but it is rather different here." "Why?" I asked, feeling a trifle hurt. Only I got no answer, for at that moment someone came along and dragged Vanka away. He's as busy at the factory as a militiaman at a crowded corner. He has a thousand things to do all at once ; so many people come and drag him in every direction that it's quite impossible to have a talk with

him. (And that's just what I needed him for.) He also has a devil of a lot of Party[1] work to do. Just when I was talking to him some lanky fellow came in, and Vanka jumped at him : " What are you hanging about here for ? " " I'm not hanging about—I mean——" " You mean ? What are you doing to-night ? " " Well, you see, there is something I've wanted to ask you about." " Well ! well ! well ! what is it ? Hurry up ! I've no time to waste," said Vanka and kept looking at his watch. The other one then began : " Well, listen. I've got a matter here. . . . It's confidential. It is about that plot of land I'll be able to work. . . . "

" Now, there you are ! The spring is the time to talk about that. I've no time to waste now. Look here, Pashka ! Instead of trailing round doing nothing, hadn't you better go and talk to the old-believers for a while. Tell them about how to grow vegetables on different soils and that sort of thing—they like it. I was once an old-believer myself."

" But—I'm not much of an orator."

" Oh, never mind that ; you'll manage it all right. Run along now ! "

The fellow went away, and I said to Vanka : " Well, you're some commander ! Who are those old-believers ? "

" That's what we call the seasonal workers. They won't enter the Communist Alliance, and

[1] The " Party " means the Communist Party.

merely try to quarrel with the others. We ought to organise them. . . . What do you want, Zykova ? " A very small girl, wearing a huge cap and looking like an umbrella on two legs, came in, glanced at me, and said : " I've come about Gerasimova again, Vanya." " Why, what's wrong ? " " She's got hold of Kulkov now. Eating one fellow up after another ; absolutely mad, that's what she is ! Why don't you go and talk to her ? "

" Want to send her to the doctor ? To hell with the doctor. I was once a doctor myself."

" Why, you said you were a singer in the choir before you came here."

" A singer ? Yes, I may have been that too. Kostya here will tell you who I was. But don't listen to me ; you know I merely talk nonsense."

" If only they all talked nonsense like you ! " said Zykova, with a crooked smile. " But what shall we do about Gerasimova ? At anything you say to her, she just starts ' Tra-ta-ta, tra-la-la,' and off she goes. I even threatened to report her to the Unit, but she just laughed. It's really stopped being a joke ! " said Zykova, getting quite angry. " It's the factory that suffers from it ; for no sooner does she get hold of a fellow than his output is lowered by 75 per cent. The bitch ! Tra-la-la, indeed ! Just look at her out there," said Zykova, pointing at the window.

" Come here, Gerasimova," Vanka shouted

at the pitch of his voice. " Why weren't you at the meeting of the women's section ? Why did you miss the Unit meeting? And what about your *politgrammar* class ? Is it all rubbish to you ? And tell me this—who's going to take care of our ' Liquidation of Ignorance ' work?"

" Why, what's wrong with you, Vanka ? " said the girl, stopping in the middle of the yard.

" Nothing's wrong with me. But what about the Peasant Assistance, and the Peasant Patronage, and the Wall-sheet and Lenin's Corner ? " said Vanka, without listening to her. " What about the Co-operative ? The Health Department ? The Air-force Chemistry ? What about the Children's Friends ? Come right up here ! "

I went out with Zykova. "There's 'tra-ta-ta' for you," she murmurred as she went along. For some reason I didn't want to talk to her.

In the yard I met the Pashka fellow.

" Why are you interested in agriculture ? Are you a peasant ? " I asked him.

" Father was probably once a peasant," he readily replied. " But what am I ? We've lived at the factory for thirty years."

" Then why did you talk about plots to Vanka ? "

" Because I needed to," he drawled, and suddenly gave me a suspicious glance. " What are you ? Are you party or non-party ? "

" I'm in the Party."

" Well, then, keep your mouth well shut," he said hurriedly, and walked away.

There are many things I want to talk to Vanka about.

June 16 :

Victor Shahov is certainly a queer bird. He came to see me to-day, kept silent for a long time, and then suddenly asked : " Have you chosen your faculty ? " " No, not quite. Have you ? " " No, neither have I. What are you busy at now?" I started telling him how I worked at sociology and maths., and was preparing for the matric., when he suddenly interrupted me. " Well, will you do it if I ask you for something." " It all depends." " Well, then. I've got a brother. I don't know what's happened to him. It's seven years since he disappeared. Well, you see—I don't know how to explain it. Anyway, I've got a thing here that I want given to him in case he turns up."

" What sort of thing ? "

" Oh, nothing that matters. Just a little book. I believe something is going to happen to me, so, in case it does, I wanted to ask you if you would——"

" I understand. But, then, haven't you got your father ? "

" I don't—trust my father. Although you're a damn fool, you're an honest fellow."

" Well, you've certainly got a damned cheek, Shahov," said I, getting terribly angry. " You had better find someone cleverer than me. And, though I'm no more a damn fool than yourself, I shan't do any of your fishy jobs." " You won't ? " " No." " All right, go to hell ! " He got up, wandered about the room for a bit, poked his nose into the door, and then turned round again : " So you won't ? "

" I've told you already. Go to——. Can't you leave me in peace ? "

" Won't you do it if I get down on my knees before you ? "

" If you do, I'll call in father, so we'll both have a laugh."

" Listen, Kostya. I don't care whether you do it or not. I really don't care about anything. Only I've always known you to be a good fellow. So now then—won't you hear my last request ? "

" What's all this last request business ? What's going to happen to you ? "

" Well, I think—I'm afraid something's going to happen. You wouldn't understand it, anyway. You are a ball."

" What kind of ball, damn it ? "

" A round thing . . . without edges."

" And what are you ? "

" Honestly, it isn't worth discussing. Anyway, I'm going to give you a little book, which you'll

hand to my brother if he ever turns up and asks for me."

"Well, all right. Only listen—it isn't anything counter-revolutionary?"

"No, there's no counter-revolution about it. Do you see? You can open it and read it to your heart's content. Only don't show it or give it to anyone else. I shouldn't like you to."

Victor Shahov then handed me a little parcel and went away. Naturally I opened it at once, and found inside it an ancient little book with this title on its front page:

ALMANACK

Anno Domini 1803

PRINCE VITALI FEDOROVICH SHAHOVSKOY

This was followed by a calendar and a little folded bit of paper, all yellow with age, with the following words written in a fanciful handwriting:

My descendant, be a Mason.

I have heard something about these Masons. I believe they used to have secret meetings at night, where they tickled each other with rapiers; then one of them would lie down in a coffin and pretend to be dead, while the others slapped him on his bald head to show that he really was. One of our skworkers told us that

most of the Masons were bourgeois, even though they called themselves "Freemasons."

I went on examining Shahov's calendar, and found a lot of interesting stuff in it. For instance, there was a poem in it :

Blessed is he who shields the poor.
To dry their tears is wise.
For such a man finds in his heart
The joys of paradise.

And, further, it contains some entries written in the same handwriting (I suppose it's all by that Prince Shahovskoy) :

February 20.—My reeve has flogged my peasant Timofey Ipatov for his laziness. I have given Ipatov some medicine which will heal the scars on his back. But will it? Paid 110 in silver for a bay horse called Magpie.

Have finally decided to sell three families to Gorynsky. Received 80 on account, the price for the lot being 300 in silver.

February 26.—The paper states that a battle with the French lasted from yesterday afternoon until to-day midnight.

Bought a piebald mare, for which I paid 120 in silver.

Bought a psalter written in 1564.

March 24.—Have had my maid Feklushka flogged for lewdness. Medicine was handed out to her.

For such a man finds in his heart
The joys of paradise.
(Song of the Freemasons.)

March 21.—Sidorka, my footman, has gone to God. This medicine is useless. I must sell six more families to Gorynsky. It was his suggestion.

On *May 4th* I sent a notice to the *Gazette* concerning Gavrilka's flight ; but on the 8th he returned of his own accord. Have given the medicine to the reeve. My peasant Timofey Ipatov died on the 3rd of this month. He was a good, honest, hard-working peasant, so may God have mercy on his soul.

The *Gazette* states : The Sublime Porte has announced its decision to use in public documents, instead of " the French Court " the title of " Emperor and Padishah of France." In Munich the marriage has been celebrated of Augusta Amalia, Princess of Bavaria, and of Beauharnais, whom Bonaparte has appointed Viceroy of Italy, and who has adopted the name of Eugene Napoleon. Though a Freemason, Bonaparte is a mangy cur and a usurper.

On *June 16* two of my serfs were flogged. The reeve for being disrespectful to his master and Feklushka for more lewdness. Medicine was given to both.

June 23.—I am writing this at my beloved Wheat Manor. I see the green garden through the window and have remembered the latest lines of our immortal Gabriel Derzhavin :

> *The Stream of Time that drowns in deep Oblivion*
> *The deeds of men, of Empires and of Kings.*

Indictum 1–10. Sun circle 3-7. Moon circle F 1-19. Basis G. Epacta H 1-0. The limit—Omega.

The rest is on the same lines. It's full of ancient rubbish, but there is one fact that stands out very clearly—the old landowner

used to flog his people and then give them medicine, and this he called "shielding the poor."

I have read a great deal about these old serf-owners, but I have never read anything that showed what beasts they really were.

I must ask Shahov what it all means, and, if he won't explain it, he had better keep out of my way in future. I feel as if this little book were soaked in the blood of the peasants and watered with the landowner's drivelling tears. This Prince Shahovskoy was obviously the biggest scoundrel that ever walked the earth.

June 20 :

I am staying with my aunt at Voskresensk, and I've had a funny and rather ridiculous experience to-day. I spend much of my time walking about the woods ; I like to be alone and to feel as though I were a savage who may meet an enemy at any moment—say a rhinoceros or a wild camel.

Yesterday I took off all my clothes, and, after hiding them in a hollow trunk, set out, with a big stick in my hand. I read in some book that an American hunter had spent two months like that. He says that if you don't touch any of the dwellers in the wood—birds, beasts, or insects—they will never come near you.

It was very nice at first stepping softly on the

silky moss, and a little breeze blowing. Of course, I didn't want to meet anybody in case I was laughed at, but then it's just my way to make experiments of every kind. During our phys.-cultural exercises and during the sun-baths our fellows really wear nothing but little pants—but, even so, that's quite different.

I came to a little brook and stretched myself out on the sunny grass. Only after a short while the midges began to bite. At first I tried to squash them, but then I remembered the American hunter who stuck to the end to his principle of not killing anything (except trout which he ate). I therefore got up and left the spot. The midges came after me. Finally I ran till I found a spot where there were no midges ; it also was near a brook with sandy banks. Although the flies bothered me a great deal, I managed to take a long sun-bath. By that time the sun was going down and I meant to go home—for home was over four miles away. So I went along the side of the brook, which gradually widened into a little river, and, after coming to the broken branch, I took a sharp turn to the right, to the splintered pine-tree. Then, trying to remember my way, I made for the tree where I had hidden my clothes. Only there was no such tree there ; or, rather, there was a tree, very like the other one, only it had no hollow trunk. I turned back to the stream, where I had found the broken branch, and,

carefully considering every step, I went in a new direction which I thought was correct. Suddenly I saw a crowd of village girls coming my way ; so I hid behind a bush and shouted :

" Go along, quick ! "

But they only laughed and screamed :

" Just look at the shameless fellow walking about the wood in his birthday suit ! Let's give him nettles ! "

There was a big crowd of them, and I noticed that some of them were getting round me from behind, while some of the others started picking nettles. So I brandished my stick and shouted at them : " See this stick ? So keep off ! "

But, screaming and laughing, they came near enough to whip me with some long withered branches, till I took to my heels. At first they pretended to pursue me, but in the end they stopped. I ran through the wood for a long time, and there was a cold wind ; I hardly knew what to do. At last I came to a clear space where it was lighter, and I realised that it wasn't long till sunset. I had read in our old epic songs of how the ancient knights put their ear to the ground to hear the approach of an enemy. So that's what I did. It may be very silly, only I'd really like to see what anyone else would have done in my place. So I put my ear to the ground, and actually heard the sound of lowing and bleating, and realised that a herd was coming my way. I was overjoyed, for I knew that

where there was a herd there must also be a shepherd. And, indeed, a herd appeared. I was surprised to see that, instead of following it, the shepherd walked in front reading a book and trailing his whip along the ground.

I shouted at him : " Eh, comrade ! " He was probably surprised, but didn't show it, and asked :

" What's the matter ? "

I told him of my adventures and asked his advice. " What's the hollow trunk like ? " he asked. I told him it was very wide and deep, and that there probably wasn't another one as big in the whole wood.

" It must be the one at the Kuzka ditch," he said. " It must be that. Come here, Philip ! "

A boy wearing a huge jacket came out from behind the cows. The shepherd took his jacket and gave it to me. " You might at least cover up your origin," he said.

I put on the jacket, and the shepherd told the boy to watch the herd for a while, and then went with me in search of the hollow tree. As we walked I had a look at the shepherd. He was quite a young fellow, and I asked him :

" What's the book you're reading ? "

He handed it to me. It was Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons.*

" Why, do you understand all this ? " I blurted out.

"Why not?" said the shepherd cheerfully. "I wouldn't be reading it otherwise."

"Where did you get it?"

"At the U.A.F.W."[1]

"Why, are you a member?"

"Of course I'm a member. All the shepherds, even if they are only seasonal workers, belong to the Union. Did you think shepherds weren't human beings at all? Who are you?"

"I've just finished the secondary school, and I'm now preparing for the University."

"What faculty?"

"I'm not sure yet. The lit., I suppose."

"I'm on the phys.-maths."

I stopped with surprise. "How do you mean?"

"Well, it'll be my second year next winter."

"But then—you're a shepherd."

"Well, what about it? In the summer I'm a shepherd. In the winter I'm a student."

"Well, I'm damned! And what's your name?"

"I've got a queer name—it's Afinogen. The fellows call me 'Fin-agent.'"[2]

"But, I say! did you finish the secondary school?"

"No, I got on to the workers' faculty, and then was taken on to the phys.-maths. Well, here's your tree."

[1] Union of Agriculture and Forestry Workers.

[2] Financial agent, i.e. inspector of taxes.

And, indeed, it was the right tree. I pulled out my clothes and dressed. The shepherd at once turned round and went back to his cows.

June 26 :

I met Sylva Dubinin, and she told me, first thing, of her great joy—she's learning shorthand. " The main thing in shorthand," she said, " is experience ; the signs themselves are nothing at all." It makes her specially happy to think that she will be on her own and independent of her family. At her home, things are as bad as ever. They've had several court cases already, but her father is determined not to go away, and her mother isn't too anxious for it, either.

I told Sylva about Victor Shahov, and she agreed that he was a very queer fellow, and probably mad. I was sorry I hadn't Shahov's book with me to show to her.

When we were parting, Sylva shook my hand at great length, and suddenly said : " You are a man, Vladlen, and so you hardly realise how glad I am to be independent. With your male psychology, it is difficult to understand how much the Revolution has done for women."

I was slightly amused.

" How do you know," I asked, " how woman felt before the Revolution ? "

" It's my instinct that tells me," she said

quite earnestly, " It's something innate, sucked in with one's mother's milk—and you'll never understand it. The whole of female psychology has been turned upside down. For many centuries woman depended entirely on man ; she was chained to him ; and then suddenly—— Look here, I know quite well how you fellows —even the best among you—look upon girls. All you want is to paw them for a bit, live with them for a week, and then good-bye."

" How do you make that out ? " I asked, much surprised.

" I know it because I've seen so many cases of it. Man, the lord of creation, turns up his nose and walks away as though it didn't concern him. And the rotters will afterwards despise a woman, as much as to say that she's committed a crime. And, do you know, Riabtsov," said Sylva growing quite angry, " that even now in England a girl who has committed the so-called crime isn't allowed into a so-called respectable house ? "

" But to hell with them, Sylva," said I, " that's the bourgeoisie——"

" No, it's the question of a moral code which still continues to work all through the world. Why, even in our working-class quarter no matron can help making faces at ' such ' girls. But we needn't go so far. What about yourself ? Are *you* perfect in this respect ? Don't *you* care if a girl has lived with a fellow or not ? "

" Really, I don't care."

" It's a lie," Sylva cried, " That's just the trouble, you do care. But it isn't merely the relation between the sexes that matters. I haven't any time just now ; but remember that we women are now e-man-ci-pa-ted, we are no longer your slaves, you lords of the universe ! We are your equals ; no ! we are your superiors, for we give birth to new men—which is more than you can do. And we are also going to progress in every field—we shall be engineers, soldiers, inventors, artists—we shall beat you at your own game ! "

" Every head a burning torch," I said.

" Wh-what ? " said Sylva, suddenly stopping.

" I heard an orator say that. That's how he spoke : ' Each head a burning torch, each heart an oriflamme, each thought a tin of dynamite." We both laughed, and Sylva asked :

" But what's an oriflamme ? "

" I don't know. A double rhyme, I suppose. But won't you admit that those weren't your own words."

" How do you mean—not my own words ? "

" Well, you probably heard them somewhere and remembered them. Come on, admit it ! "

" Of course, a lot of it mayn't be my own," said Sylva, " but if I feel it myself, it's quite sufficient. I told you you wouldn't understand it. And no man will ever understand all that the Revolution has given women."

" Well, and have you decided what to do ? "

" I'm going to take medicine."

" I see, so you'll be a doctor ? What'll you do if, in five years' time, I go to see you and say : ' Doctor, I've got a belly-ache ? ' "

Here she grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and began to shake me till I yelled :

" Damn it, Sylva ! Let me go, or I'll tell all your patients how you'll treat them ! "

June 30 :

I had just entered the factory yard when Vanka opened the window and shouted : " Come here, Kostya ! I've got some business for you." When I went into the factory committee room he said to me : " Look here, we've got some trouble with our seasonal workers. I sent Ganya Cheezh along to talk to them and they nearly pushed her face in ; and Pashka, as you know yourself, is a fathead. You see, there are some very fine and conscientious fellows among them who know their *politgrammar*. On the other hand, there's also an old duffer among them—a kind of foreman of theirs. They call him ' leader,' and do just whatever he tells them. They won't even listen to you when you tackle the religious problem. No sooner do you begin than they start putting questions to you : ' What do you believe in ? ' If you tell them you don't believe in anything,

they answer : ' No, you pray to the red rag hanging above your gate instead of an icon.' And your God, they say, is called Carla Marla, and you're told to put up stone idols to your god and feed them on peasants' blood."

" But surely, Vanka, there are no such characters nowadays ! "

" They come from some place called the Marisky Province ; besides, they're not all like that. But their foreman is and they all obey him. It's Sunday to-day and you'll find them all in their barracks. Ganya Cheezh has already gone down to talk to them. Instead of loafing around doing nothing, you just go along with Pashka."

Before Pashka and I reached the barracks we heard excited voices in the distance. When we came nearer, we found a group of fellows sitting on a pile of planks and a girl with a red scarf—evidently Ganya Cheezh—arguing violently with an old man. " We've nothing to do with you Carla Marla folks," the old man was shouting, " We're in favour of the Government ! You just leave us alone ! We've shown in Kolchak's days on whose side we were ! "

"But wait a minute, Uncle," Ganya tried to interrupt him.

"I'm no uncle of yours. My fellows believe in God. We're not like you people—someone's shown you a red rag and you just run after it. God damn your soul ! Go to where you've come

from ! Even your girls wear breeches, the shameless hussies ! Damn them ! "

The Ganya girl had evidently decided that the old man was quite hopeless, for she turned to the fellows.

" Comrades," she said, " the Capitalists of the world are preparing for another war against us ! The international bourgeoisie is getting ready a new intervention. So you must concentrate on *politgrammar*. You are handicraft workers, I'm a factory worker ; one proletarian must shake hands with another . . ."

The moment Pashka and I arrived on the spot, the old man suddenly stretched his hands above Ganya's head, and, trying to pull off her red scarf, he cried : " Take it off, take off the mark of anti-Christ. Repent, you who——" But Ganya hit out, and among general laughter, the old man rolled to the ground, where he completed his sentence : " Whore of Babylon."

" See the result of phys.-culture ! " Pashka whispered to me ; while Ganya proceeded as though nothing had happened. " Well, comrades, the war of the Capitalists against the workers must be crushed totally and completely ! It is really amazing that Red young men like you should not wish to join the League of Communist Youth. At least thirty and a half per cent. of our factory girls have enrolled for the League's social activities . . . "

We didn't notice that the desperate old man had walked round to the other side of the group. Suddenly he hit Ganya hard on the back with his stick. Ganya, staggered, gasped, and dropped to the ground. Like a tiger, Pashka leaped at the old man, seized his stick, and, flourishing it wildly round his head, he roared:

"You're not to fight!"

"Didn't she hit me with her big fists?" the old man mumbled.

"Oh, you fatheads!" Pashka roared, brandishing the stick as he went close up to them. We've come here to talk about agriculture—different kinds of vegetables, and all you do is to hit us with your sticks. . . . You degenerate devils! . . . I'm a gardener myself!"

"The scoundrels!" said Ganya, with a pained expression. "It's my sore side, too. Oh, damn them! Let's go, Pashka."

"No, we can't leave it at this," I cried, going up to the old man. "Look here, old man, don't you know the Soviet laws? You're not allowed to hit people. You'll have to answer for it. Come on to the militia station!"

"I'm not afraid of your anti-Christ brand," the old man said firmly. "Let's go wherever you like."

"Leave them alone," said Ganya. "Come along, comrade. The militia's got nothing to do with this. Let's go."

July 4 :

I went to see Nikpetozh, and came back with a very strange impression. I shall try to record our conversation as precisely as possible.

Nikpetozh said that every man can be distinguished by his class characteristics ; and not only the man, but his actions, too. Of course, that's true, but the trouble is that Nikpetozh gets rather mixed in his ideas. We were talking of Vanka Petukhov.

" Petukhov," said Nikpetozh, " is a pure proletarian."

" Does it not matter that Vanka was once a tradesman and sold cigarettes in the street ? " I asked.

" Of course not. During the Civil War even adult workers made mechanical lighters at home ; but that doesn't make them handicraft workers." " Well, and how would you describe Elena Nikitichna ? "

" My dear Kostya," he said, with an air of regret, " we are all unclassed intellectuals. In the old days we served the bourgeoisie ; now we serve the proletariat. And this duality, like the duality of the teaching systems, is bound to have an effect on our work."

" But, surely, you're a conscientious worker," said I. " What more do you want ? "

" That isn't enough. In order to give full

value, one's got to be born and bred in the right atmosphere."

"Look here Nikolay Petrovich," I said. "I have come across a young worker called Pashka Brychev. He has never been in the country, and yet he raves all the time about agriculture. How would you class him?"

"That doesn't surprise me," said Nikpetozh. "Russia is mainly a peasant country, and every worker is, to a certain extent, rooted to the soil."

"Now, to what class would you say I belonged?"

"What do you think yourself, Kostya?"

"I should like to be a proletarian."

"It's difficult, of course, to define your class," said Nikpetozh thoughtfully.

"But, in any case, it'll be easier for you than for us. Now, for instance, you feel your responsibility towards life and towards the working class, and that helps you to live. Take me, on the other hand."

Nikpetozh wandered about the room and heaved a sigh.

"My dear, silly boy," he said. "Life has proved stronger than me. I treated life as a joke. Do you know how I was brought up? I ought to tell you the whole story, only—I've no time. But here's my point. Whenever I did something wrong, my father used to whip me till I roared like a steam-engine. Then father would call in

the porter and they would haul me into the cow-shed. It was such a huge, terrible cow; she would stare at me as she chewed the cud and puff noisily at me through her huge nostrils. At first I used to be frightened, but later I would get into the manger, and from there spit down right into the cow's nostrils. I've treated life in the same way. At first I was afraid, but later I spat at it—right into its nostrils ! For a long time the cow suffered me and went on chewing the cud. But in the end she must have got tired of my spitting, and one day began to moow in a threatening way. She moowed for a long time, while I stayed in the manger half-dead with fright, every moment expecting her to butt me with her horns. But the cow didn't touch me, and, after roaring for a while, she went back to her everlasting cud. " Aha ! " thought I to myself, and, taking a handful of hay, I rubbed it into a fine powder and threw it at the cow, aiming at her nostrils. Then I became drowsy, and gradually slipped right down into the manger. I had already begun to dream when suddenly I heard a thunderbolt or a cannon, as though the whole roof had crashed. I jumped up in terror—that was it? The cow had sneezed. I grew furious, and began throwing big handfuls of hay at the cow's nose. And, would you believe it ? After looking at me for a while with a puzzled expression, the cow slowly moved round and turned her tail toward me."

" Is that all ? " I asked seeing very clearly little Nikpetozh sitting in the manger throwing hay-dust at the cow.

" Unfortunately, yes," said Nikpetozh.

" And unfortunately the analogy is correct to the very end. My life has just been like that cow."

" That's nonsense, Nikolay Petrovich," said I. " Your life isn't at all as bad as all that. Everybody likes and respects you——"

" Not everybody—that's just the trouble," said he, interrupting me. " Well, I've put sad thoughts into your head " (he hadn't done anything of the kind), " so let me finish by telling you a little story—Russian history in characters."

" I don't care for stories—still, go on ! "

" It isn't really a story at all," he said, " it is an actual fact about an acquaintance of mine, a certain Citizen Romanov. He had several sons whom he named chronologically after Russian history—at least, as it was taught in the old school. Oleg, Igor, and Sviatoslav died in their infancy. But Citizen Romanov wouldn't stop there. He left out Ivan the Terrible for his cruelty, Boris Godunov for being a usurper, and Vassili Shuisky for being a hypocrite. But he honoured Michael as symbolising peace in Russia after the years of anarchy, and so his eldest son was called Michael. He left out Alexey, for, though he was called ' the Meek,'

he didn't distinguish himself by anything in particular. Peter the Great, however, was given his due, and his next son was christened Peter. Paul, being a lunatic, was left out. The third son was called Alexander in honour of Alexander the Blessed ; and, finally, the last one was named Nicholas, in honour of the ' happily reigning monarch.' In this way he honoured the beginning of the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the affectionate papa called Michael ' Seventeeenth,' Peter ' Eighteenth ; Alexander ' Nineteenth,' and Nicholas ' Twentieth.'

" That isn't Russian history," said I scornfully. " That's only tsars."

" That's just the point, my dear Kostya ; history used to be taught exactly in that manner. Why, I taught it like that myself—in the old school, of course. But this isn't the end of my story yet. When the great explosion came, all the old notions were turned upside down, and, speaking figuratively, kicked their heels in the air. Michael, Peter, and Alexander died heroic deaths while Deniken's troops were storming a restaurant at Melitopol. When the city was captured, they got drunk and were shot, as their father maintained, by the secret agents of the Bolsheviks. Nicholas alone remained. The ' saint ' after whom he had been christened had long ago been burned in some wood near Ekaterinburg, and since then his

father had noticed that his son was having no luck. When he tried to make shoe-polish, he only made a black, watery mess ; if he took a bag of flour anywhere he was bound to be stopped by a provision detachment ; no sooner would he get a job than the staff would be cut down. And, as it was a hard time, citizen Romanov decided to change his name to *Marseillaisov*, and kept bothering Nicholas to do the same. But no ! Nicholas protested. ' Why didn't I name him Leon,' Marseillaisov would sadly say to himself. In honour of—you know whom I mean. And on the quiet he called his son Leon."

" I don't understand your story," said I. (I really didn't like it at all. Nikpetozh didn't talk at all in his usual way. And I didn't care for his story.)

" What are you driving at ? " I asked him. " You see, my dear Kostya, there's a question that's worrying me—this question of the Russian *intelligentsia*. But we'll discuss it again some day."

What's the *intelligentsia* got to do with it? It's a pity to see one's favourite teacher suddenly change into an insincere twister. No wonder Vanka Petukhov didn't approve of him.

July 6 :

Sylva constantly carries her shorthand note-books with her, and seizes every opportunity to

write something down. When I talked to her she kept writing all the time. I told her about my talk with Nikpetozh.

" If I were a petty-bourgeois I would say he had something wrong here," said she, pointing to her heart and continuing to write. I felt envious of her, and asked her what she thought I could do for a permanent living. She advised me to learn languages—French and English for instance, which would enable me to do translation work. I don't think I could stick it.

July 8 :

I got into a fine fix to-day. I hadn't seen Vanka Petukhov since that last affair, but I went there to-day. I got there during the lunch interval, and the Committee Room was crowded. All the same, Vanka noticed me at once, and shouted at the pitch of his voice : " Here's another youngster—also a great loafing specialist." I must say that I don't at all like Vanka's new commanding manner of talking to me. I admit he's an activist with a terrible amount of Party work on his hands, but that's really no excuse for shouting at me like that without even explaining what's wrong.

" Don't bawl like that, Vanka," I said. " You've got into the habit of behaving like a regular Chamberlain."

" You had better tell us," he said, " what you managed to do about the seasonal workers."

" I'm not your inferior, and I don't even belong to your Unit, so you've no business to order me about."

" Oh, I see ! " said Vanka. " Only, whatever Unit you belong to, you undertook to help us in our work with the seasonal workers, and, instead of that, you shamefully ran away."

" In any case, it was impossible to do anything," I answered.

" What was impossible ? Nothing's impossible," said Vanka, flaring up, " All that's possible for fellows like you is to loaf around. What is the old man but a ghost of the damned past ? I've talked to the seasonal workers myself, and I know there are plenty of good fellows among them who will do fine for the League. And they'll join it too, without asking the old man's permission. And you fellows come along telling me it's *impossible*."

Here I noticed that Pashka, who had gone with me to the seasonal workers, was also in the room. He stood there with downcast eyes, looking greatly embarrassed, twisting his cap in his hands. I grew quite angry. " You talk like a militarist and an imperialist," said I to Vanka, " and I object to it. Let me know when you're in a more sensible mood, and I'll come and talk to you then."

" Oh, you —— secondary school ! " said

Vanka, while I turned round and walked out. Pashka followed me.

" Does he always talk like that ? " I asked him.

" Listen . . . it's the only way. The people are ignorant. So he's got to," said Pashka. " The whole factory depends on him. But, you know, he doesn't always swear at you," said he cheerfully, smiling to himself. " He can be really *very* kind. Only they're taking him away from us."

" Where's he going ? "

" He's being sent to the Institute of National Economy. Do you see ? He's going to be an Administrative Specialist—a Director. That's the kind of fellow he is ! " said Pashka proudly. I didn't know that, and Vanka hadn't bothered to tell me. So he'll be at the University, as well. But Pashka interested me more.

" Well, have you talked to him yet about your plot of ground ? " I asked.

" No, not yet," he replied reluctantly ; " he's too busy."

" Let me help you," said I. " Let's both go to the library, and get out some literature——"

" No, no, it's a secret," said Pashka hurriedly.

" How can it be a secret if we're both in the League ? "

" That's so ; but still—— You may laugh at me," he mumbled. " Wait ! I'll tell you all about it some other time. Next time I see you."

July 13 :

A horrible thing has happened, and I haven't got over it yet. I was walking down the street when I saw Zin-Palna on the other side rushing along looking terribly pale and excited. I ran after her and stopped her.

" A disaster has happened," she said. " The militia has just called for me. Shahov has shot himself just inside the gate of Stasya Velipolsky's house."

When she said it my legs nearly gave way. Now at last I understood the meaning of his strange behaviour and his allusions to the fact that " something was going to happen." I followed Zin-Palna to Stasya's house. A large crowd stood outside the gate, but the militiaman wouldn't let them go inside, though he let Zin-Palna and me pass. There was no one in the doorway. Shahov had been carried up to an empty flat. I shall never forget the scene. A very long body lay on the floor of the empty room. The face was missing. I found out later that Victor Shahov had used a gun which he had made himself. His head was blown to smithereens, and the gun itself had exploded in his hand ; he must have put in too much gunpowder. A militiaman sat on the windowsill writing things down in a book. And a man in an overcoat—it was the doctor—was examining the body and dictating to the militiaman.

I only saw this scene for a minute, for the ambulance arrived and the body was carried out on a stretcher. But I still see it all before my eyes.

" We have found a card of your school in his pocket," said the militiaman after being told who Zin-Palna was. " And this thing." He produced a parcel with " To be handed to Constantine Riabtsov " written on it. I said it was for me.

" In that case, we must question you," said the militiaman. " There was no note about ' not blaming anyone for his death ' that one usually finds on suicides. Will you come with me, Citizen Riabtsov."

I followed him to the militia station, from where I have only just returned. They examined me for quite a long time. They asked me how friendly we were, and all that kind of thing. They also asked me what I knew about his relations with Stasya Velipolsky, but I told them I knew nothing about it. They opened the parcel, but, as they found nothing in it that could interest them, they returned it to me. I haven't examined it yet ; I only know that there are some poems in it. All that they copied from the letter that Shahov had written to me was the fact that his name wasn't Shahov at all, but ex-Prince Victor Andreyevich Shahovskoy, and that he had been obliged to change his name before entering our

school. Here I remembered the almanack he had recently given me : evidently that Prince Shahovskoy was a grandfather or great-grandfather of his.

I'm feeling very unhappy ; and it is too late now to go to Vanka's factory.

July 14 :

I missed Vanka at the factory ; but the work was coming to an end, and I met Pashka Brychev coming out of the main building. He brightened up when he saw me, and, seizing me by the hand said cheerfully, " Let's go to the wood." I felt unhappy at being alone, so I gladly agreed to his suggestion. As he walked along, Pashka babbled a great deal, and I must have been answering his questions wearily, for in the end he asked :

" You're kind of dull to-day. Has anything gone wrong ? Maybe your girl's gone off with another fellow ? It's my trouble too," he continued, without awaiting an answer. " Every time I want to walk out with a girl, some swell fellow comes dashing along—and I'm always done in the eye. Girls are such f-f-fools ! " he cried, waving his arms about. " All they want is a new pair of well-pressed trousers, and a new tie, and that the fellow should use big words. The fools never think of the social side of things."

" But they aren't all like that," I said.

" But then the others are no better. There's that Zykova girl—you know her. Well, I once simply blurted out to her ' Here, won't you let me love you ? ' And would you believe it ? She nearly brought it before the Unit. Even Vanka could hardly quieten her. How she cursed and swore ! "

" But you can't do that ! " I laughed. " You must first of all take her out for a walk, and talk about the stars, or take her to the cinema and cuddle her for a bit—you can't get everything at a moment's notice."

" Catch her going out for walks ! She has hardly time to breathe ! Remember, brother, she's an ac-tiv-ist ! (he uttered the word in a holy whisper). She has almost as many Party duties as Petukhov. Cinema ! Cuddling ! You need time for that."

" I suppose you expect to have it all ' one—two—three—thank you ! ' No, you'll never get anything that way. But where are we going ? " For we had already gone far past the town and were crossing a field, making a bee-line through undergrowth and bushes towards some spot known only to Pashka himself.

" You were trying to find out about—the land," he said ; " we're going there now. Only listen, brother, it's a secret. I've only told Ganya Cheezh about it—for she's reliable. So there you are."

" Am I reliable, too ? "

" That's not the point. You've been to school and can help me with your advice."

Pashka walked on without looking where he was going ; with giant steps he plunged through thickets, hopped through the bog till the mud splashed all over his trousers and shirt—and over me, too. At last he stopped.

" Here," he said, and bent down. A large mushroom with a mouldy top was hidden away among the dead leaves. " Look ! "

" Well, what about it ? That's only an old worm-eaten mushroom," said I in surprise. " I can't see anything else."

" It isn't rotten,"' said Pashka in a tone of conviction. " It's a seed mushroom ! These mushrooms—no one knows how to breed them. At the same time I read in a book that they were one of our natural riches—one of the riches of the U.S.S.R. So I decided it ought to be developed sys-tem-atic-ally. Mushrooms ought to be watched like children. Aren't mushrooms born of a mother, like people ? Tell me."

" Maybe," said I, choking with laughter, " but what about it ? "

" I don't know. Only I've been experimenting with them all summer. Just think of it ! " he said, counting on his fingers—" salted mushrooms, dried mushrooms, pickled mushrooms, mushrooms for cooking—can mushrooms be tinned, too ? "

" I suppose so. Even a kind of caviar is made of mushrooms."

" Very well, then—tinned mushrooms, too. And they say there are no mushrooms at all in all the foreign countries."

" I don't really know—maybe there aren't any."

" I'm sure there are none. Just think how much money can be made by breeding mushrooms for foreign export ! "

" Quite profitable, I suppose. Only how can you breed them ? "

" Here, look ! I haven't shown you the main thing yet."

Pashka turned over a few heaps of dead leaves, and I noticed a number of smaller mushrooms growing round the big one.

" It's from the seeds," he said with an air of conviction.

" Of course it's from the seeds," I said, " only it's always like that with these mushrooms—there are always a few small ones round a big one. Where does your artificial breeding come in ? "

" But don't you understand, you fool," he said impatiently. " First of all, I discovered this mushroom."

" Well ? "

" Secondly, I nursed it."

" Well, I don't know how you've nursed it."

" Thirdly, it's had children."

" Well, it would have had children in any case, whether you watched it or not. It's the influence of the pollen on the ovaries. You find it all in nat. history."

" Pollen, ovaries, nat. history," said Pashka disdainfully.

" Oh, you learned fellows ! But don't you realise that I watered it ? "

" Did you ? "

" Certainly. Every evening, after work, I came here and watered it."

" I'm afraid it was quite unproductive work —a sheer waste of time. You say you haven't told anyone about it except Ganya ? "

" No, no one else."

" Don't do it then—they'll just laugh at you." Pashka was terribly hurt, and kept his mouth shut all the way home.

THE FUNCTIONS OF CULTURAL ACCELERATION

July 18 :

We had a meeting at the school, at which all the available boys and girls were present, as well as their parents. Zin-Palna is apparently frightened in case Shahovskoy finds any imitators, and has decided to check the possible tendency at the very start. Many of the boys, and their parents and some *abiturients*, spoke at

the meeting—only I refrained. The most interesting and, at the same time, the most puzzling speech was made by Nikpetozh, who had also been invited. I wouldn't have been able to record his speech if it hadn't been for Sylva. As usual, she had her notebook with her, and kept taking it all down in shorthand, and to-day she brought me the text and told me I could do what I liked with it. I am therefore simply attaching it to my diary.

S. Dubinin
SHORTHAND NOTEBOOK NO. 32

N. P. Ozhegov: Yes, I admit, I am an intellectual. I have been an intellectual all my life, and I shall die one. I am not ashamed of it, although [*undecipherable*].

A parent: Excuse me, but I must interrupt Comrade Ozhegov. The Soviet Power's attitude to the intellectuals is decidedly non-antagonistic. It's the very opposite. At the present time, when, throughout the Union of Soviet Republics, the basis of Socialism is being built at a feverish speed, the intellectuals are regarded, not as obstructionists, but as people who fit into the structure of——

N. P. Ozhegov: I am not speaking of the Soviet Power. I know that that is the official attitude to the intellectual class. But I also know that it is not the attitude taken by the masses—and the masses continue to regard the intellectuals as hired mercenaries or labourers. They may be right, but that isn't my point. I want to tell everyone, everyone, everyone—as the radio announcer says—that there is *no* intellectual class left. So why trouble about it at all?

Stasya Velipolsky: Lies! Nonsense!

N. P. Ozhegov : There may be individual intellectuals, but there is no *intelligentsia* as a class. There used to be an *intelligentsia* before. But suppose that a precious diamond—it's called the Koh-i-noor, I believe—has been dropped on the ground and has been broken into a thousand or a million fragments. It would be impossible to assemble it or cement it together, That's just what has happened to the *intelligentsia*. The *intelligentsia* is played out, not because there is no further need for it, but because it no longer exists. There are only tiny fragments, a few individuals, left. This isn't an anti-revolutionary idea ; it's simply a fact, which must be recognised and must teach us to stop using that hateful word—*intelligentsia*.

The same parent : Excuse me, but I must interrupt Comrade Ozhegov once more. Contrary to what he says, the *intelligentsia* is represented at present by the *red* specialists. No one says a word about anti-revolutionary tendencies among them, and I wish Comrade Ozhegov would keep to the point and not raise unnecessary dust.

N. P. Ozhegov : I'm sorry, but I *am* keeping to the point. Well, comrades, don't swear any more at people by calling them " intellectuals "—for there is no *intelligentsia* left. It has vanished as completely as the gentry, the aristocracy, and the old Civil Service. There are *nepmen*[1] now, and specialists, and Soviet employers, and new lawyers, but the old *intelligentsia* is gone—gone for ever. By *intelligentsia* we mean a group standing for cultural acceleration. Is that the function of the old intellectuals ? Engineers now work under the control of the workers. What new social movement do the engineers represent ? None ! Are lawyers, doctors, or former municipal workers inside the present movement ? You will

[1] The new " bourgeoisie " (from N.E.P.—New Economic Policy).

say that teachers are. But teachers were always among the lowest categories of the *intelligentsia* ; they were well below the higher and middle *intelligentsia*. That's why teachers have willingly followed the Communists during the past few years. We've got to look facts in the face, comrades ! It's the Communists who are building the new order, the new forms of social life ; it is they who act as cultural accelerators.

Several voices : Hear, hear, Ozhegov !

N. P. Ozhegov : But, as a group, the intellectuals have been destroyed as a useless body ; they have been destroyed by the logical process of history itself. And if you tell me that the *intelligentsia* is co-operating with the Soviet Power, and serving the Soviet Power, I shall answer you that you are mistaken—for it is not the *intelligentsia* as a whole, but only a few categories, a few individuals. History has broken up the *intelligentsia* into a thousand, a million, fragments. Some of these fragments are now abroad, and mixed with mud to such an extent that it is hard to distinguish the mud from the diamonds. The other fragments are here in Russia, in the Soviet Union, and you see their terrible lack of uniformity. Some look like Hamlets—but I shall come to Hamlet later ; the others, like Martha in the gospel, have chosen a better way—they keep sucking at several mothers all at once. These people have broken away ; what interests them is salaries, fees, overtime pay. They have completely lost their heads with the new conditions—famine and the loss of ordinary comforts. If you showed these gentlemen their portraits as they were twenty years ago, they would turn away with contempt. Just think of it—here are people to whom a living-room and a job have become the only criteria in life ! The animal struggle for comforts : corruption, a lack not only of ideals but of intelligent interests generally ! You talk about Americanisation, a new tempo ! Nonsense ! The first thing for an American is *business* ; money is only the result. But

all our Americanised intellectual does is to cut the other man's throat for the sake of money, to raise intrigues against him, to crawl before the powerful on his hands and knees, to grab whatever he can lay his hands on, to do his term in jail, so long as he is allowed to start all over again—and in the meantime the actual work doesn't come in at all ; it can go to the devil for all he cares, for the work isn't *his* work. Hence the bureaucratic spirit, the spirit of don't-care-a-damn, hence the low standard of production in so many fields of intellectual labour. What's it got to do with America ? But even if it is America—surely it wasn't for American ideals that the intellectuals fought, and it wasn't to American ideals that they sold themselves ! No, they fought for the " people," for the welfare of the peasant and the worker, for general education, for the old progressive ideals. But now, when the time has come to bring it all into practice, they find that their old ideals are " out of date," that their banners are sold in the market together with all the other rubbish, that their ideals go no further than their women's skirts. The intellectuals have become dull and stupid, and something must be done to make this lethargic mass come to life again. And the worst of it is that these gentlemen are dragging into the morass a part of the new generation of young intellectuals——

A voice : To hell with it ! We don't need it.

N. P. Ozhegov : I'm afraid you will need it in building up the new world. But this isn't the part of the *intelligentsia* that really matters. To all intents and purposes, these people are finished—their road is the road of the nepmen. They will make up the gospel of the new bourgeoisie, its moral code and its social laws. But, dear comrades, there is yet another part, another fragment of the diamond—and these people are with *you,* they follow *your* road without sneers and without ulterior motives, without peacock feathers—they give the Revolution wholeheartedly their only capital—their

brains. These are mostly humble people—teachers, doctors, technicians, survey inspectors, agricultural instructors, and a few others. In the minority we find professors, writers, scientists, painters, actors—i.e., workers living in the capitals and the large centres. But I am not concerned with this minority. They, again, are a different class from the lower and more humble category that I mentioned at first. I am speaking, of course, of the intellectuals who have an old, pre-revolutionary record, of people brought up in the old school. By the inevitable course of events, these people are placed in the Hamlet dilemma ; there they are, crucified on the crossroads, while life goes rushing past them, bringing new creative forces to the surface. . . . What can the crucified do ? Yes, comrades, we intellectuals, who have followed the Revolution, are all going to be crucified in the end—crucified not by the Central Government, but by the storming spring torrent of the people themselves !

A voice : Keep to the point !

N. P. Ozhegov : These shipwrecked people are bound to put the question to themselves : To be or not to be ? To live or not to live ? Those are the questions raised by the intellectuals who have followed the Revolution. . . . Yes, you can live, when those around you love and trust you, and listen to your words and watch your actions, which to them are the result of an honest attitude to life and a desire to progress. But when there is no faith, no love, no trust—you inevitably ask the question : To be or not to be ? and say, No.

A voice : Away with your suicide propaganda !

N. P. Ozhegov : Let me finish. This is no propaganda. If the old hardened wolves who have known prison and exile and Siberia, who have stood face-to-face with Autocracy—if we can stand the pressure of Hamlet's question, the younger, less experienced, weaker men go under. And here is one of these young, inexperienced

delicate intellectuals who perished before our eyes a few days ago. I mean Victor Shahov. He could not resist the pressure of the dilemma—and he died.

Stasya Velipolsky : Nonsense !

N. P. Ozhegov : I mean it, comrades ! We are in a prison cell, without air—and you consider it natural. We and the air are separated by a thick wall. Yet we too used to breathe the air, and we are not allowed to, as though the air was not our due, as though we could live in airless ether while the world, with its air and its splendid light, was no longer ours ! I've looked into the A.C.Y.,[1] that laboratory of new men, and there the light shone in all its splendour and beauty. What are we ? An amputated limb, a useless fragment, a piece of emptiness, internal *émigrés*—oh, hell ! isn't that what we are ?

A voice : He's a yellow one !

END OF NOTEBOOK NO. 32.

There's a lot in this speech that I can't make out. At the same time, I don't know why Nikpetozh is making all that fuss. Suppose there's no *intelligentsia*—well, what about it ? Didn't he say himself that the Communists were pushing life forward ? As for the crucifixion of the remaining intellectuals—that's pure bunk. Nikpetozh himself works and enjoys universal trust and respect. He really seems to be a bit off his head. Victor Shahov—that's quite a different matter. Nikpetozh is quite wrong here ; for Shahov's letter and notes show quite clearly that his suicide had nothing in common with the reasons that Nikpetozh gave. I was going to

[1] Alliance of Communist Youth.

argue the point, but then decided not to bother. Curiously enough, I feel more and more suspicious of Nikpetozh each time I see him.

I read over Shahov's letter, and decided to show it to Sylva.

July 31 :

Autumn is coming nearer and nearer, and with it, the beginning of my University term ; it makes me quite nervous each time I think of it.

Father has been very unwell, and several times during the past month I've had to go to Voskresensk to borrow money from my aunt.

August 3 :

I went to see Zin-Palna, as I wanted to ask her about Nikpetozh's speech.

" I'm busy now," she said : " we'll have a talk about Nikolay Petrovich and Shahov some other time. Only remember this, Riabtsov. Quite apart from the old *intelligentsia*, there is also a new one, which Nikolay Petrovich forgot to mention.

August 15 :

The choice of a faculty is becoming more and more urgent. At first, of course, I'll have to

enter whatever faculty and department has most vacancies. They say I could then change to any other faculty in the middle of term or at the beginning of the second year. Only I'll have to find out definitely, for it'll be no joke if I join the phys.-maths. faculty and have to make physical experiments and solve maths. problems for the rest of my life !

There's another faculty which includes history and archæology, ethnography and fine arts. I don't like it, for I don't want to spend my life poking about the past. What interests me is the Present. Moreover, it isn't too easy to pump the workers at Vanka's factory about their life before the Revolution—they aren't too anxious to tell you. It is only in queues that you hear people swear by the old times, and tell you how fine things were " under the Tsar." The workers are more interested in future developments, how life will be organised in general, and how it will affect the individual worker. I've had many talks with the workers on the subject. Even the seasonal workers are more interested about the future. You can't learn much about it by studying archæology. That's why I'm against it.

The med. faculty doesn't interest me, either. I don't feel I'm made for medical work. (Say " ah ! " breathe ! sit down ! show me your excrements !) What about the literature faculty or the Soviet law faculty ? There are

several departments in the law faculty, including criminal, commercial, and international law. I could become a judge or a president or the secretary of a soviet. But the most interesting thing to be would be a diplomatic representative. But this raises the question of proletarian discipline. One mustn't be guided by one's personal interests (or else I could choose to lie in bed all day or spend all my time at the cinema), but by the urgent requirements of the proletarian republic—especially during this hard time of transition. The place to choose must be the one which will be most useful to the State, even if, personally, one finds it uninteresting and even loathsome.

Here comes the real test. If we had better teachers at our secondary schools, we wouldn't be having all these doubts. But my experience with the Outpost showed that I could handle schoolboys far better than any of the teachers. The boys obey me willingly and are delighted to do whatever I tell them. Moreover, the Unit thought our Outpost one of the best. Lastly, I found that only a modern person could teach children in the only correct proletarian way—and not the half-dead old-fashioned intellectuals. Didn't Nikpetozh admit it himself in his speech ? Moreover, a modern teacher must have a very good knowledge of *politgrammar* and Chinese politics, so as to be able to answer every question that the child may ask. I

know Berdnikov-Svetlov nearly by heart, and Kovalenko pretty well, too. But none of our skworkers[3] knew anything about Chinese politics. With *politgrammar*, too, they were quite in the dark. Once, when I asked Ludovica Carlovna, our singing teacher, "who is our Government?" she replied, "The Bolsheviks." It was hopeless trying to explain to her what the Sovnarkom[1] and the V.Z.I.K.[2] were —she only laughed. That's why such people can't be entrusted with the upbringing and training of the new generation. And that's also why I've decided to become a school-teacher. (By the time I'm through the University the term 'skworker'[3] will probably have disappeared.) But this raises another question—a teacher of what? I've puzzled over it for a long time, and have come to the conclusion that I ought to be a sociologist. But in that case I should need to know some literature, and so I've decided to enter the lit. faculty.

August 18 :

Father is lying seriously ill, and the doctor says it is myocarditis. Aleshka Cheekin comes often to see us ; his mother has died and he's staying with Zin-Palna. He and father have

[1] *Sov*iet *Nar*odnykh *Kom*issarov—Council of the People's Comissars.
[2] All-Russian Central Executive Committee (initials).
[3] *S*chool *worker*, i.e. teacher.

frequent arguments about God. Father says there is a God, even though he doesn't believe in church ritual.

"Just think of it," says Father, "how could everything have come into the world without a God? You say—it's a cell. But who made the cell? It couldn't have simply started all by itself. Don't you see?"

"Universal matter formed the cell," Aleshka replies, "and matter is eternal movement. There is, therefore, no need for a god."

"That's nonsense," says Father. "Now, for instance, I'm going to die and I know where I'm going; I know that I won't disappear completely, leaving no trace. There will always be something left over, like a tailor's cuttings. But when you die—what can you hope for?"

"I've got plenty of hopes," said Aleshka cheerfully. "In the first place, I'm not going to die at all!"

"How's that?" Father laughed. "You aren't like Kashchey the Immortal, are you? We've done away with fairy-tales, haven't we? Or are you going back to them again?"

"Fairy-tales have nothing to do with it. What I say is pure science. They've just invented rejuvenation. Everybody will be able to lengthen his life as much as he likes. And by the time I'm an old man, they'll have discovered a cure for death."

" You won't want such a cure for yourself, you little fool," said Father. " You'll be too tired, too sick of life. Besides, if you cured all people of dying, think how terribly uncomfortable it would be, with so many people in the world. They'd be murdering each other to make room for themselves. That'll cure them of death all right. Ha ! ha ! "

" Very well," said Aleshka excitedly, " let us admit that this cure will be applied only in special cases ; but I also have another hope which you haven't got and can't have."

" What's that ? "

" The hope that my work, my thoughts, my ideas won't die."

" Faith won't die, either."

" Of course it'll die, when people find out that it's of no service to life."

" How can they find that out," said Father with a smile, " Faith gives warmth to the soul and peace to the mind—people may be your enemies, but a Higher Being cares for you and loves you."

" That's just the trouble, that it doesn't work out in practice," Aleshka shouted—so loudly that I had to ask him to calm down. " Your Higher Being doesn't care a damn about you. When I lived among the strays, you should have seen how fervently I begged God to make me find a purse in the street or even make me come across a lady with a handbag. Or when mother

was dying—for I still believed, or, rather, I still hoped, that there was *something*—' Don't let mother die, don't let mother die, and I shall love you always, God.' All the same she died. Or the pimples. Surely, it wasn't a big thing to ask God to remove them—but no ! In the end I gave it up. Now it makes me laugh, but at the time, I nearly wept. Higher Being, indeed ! "

" All that doesn't prove anything," said Father. " God isn't obliged to cure your pimples. Go to the chemist—he'll put some iodine on. You've just been talking nonsense all this time—and haven't brought forward a single convincing argument." " Very well, then," cried Aleshka, seizing a pair of scissors, " I'll cut open my hand, and you can ask God to make it heal at once."

" Stop it, you fool," I said, and caught hold of the scissors, for I knew Aleshka's excitable nature. " You can have other proofs. And, besides, it isn't good for Father to get excited. The meeting is closed."

They have arguments like this every time Aleshka comes.

August 20 :

To-day I looked through some of the papers that Shahov had sent me. First of all there is this letter :

" Riabtsov,—You know how strongly I

desired to acquire knowledge. I worked hard, and never allowed laziness and flabbiness to overcome me. I worked with a definite object in view. I achieved a great deal. My poetry was accepted by the magazines. My papers always aroused much interest—you know it.

" I must state more clearly to you what I feel. It's painful to have no one to talk to. By pretending to talk to you, I'm really talking to myself.

" You are a circle ; I am a triangle. One angle rests on the past, another on the present, the third in the future. I can't get rid of the past (I'm a Prince), I can't be part of the present (I'm a blue-blooded degenerate), and the future is nonsensical (it's the logical conclusion of my philosophic thought).

" I really don't care what people will think and say of me when I am dead. I wouldn't do it otherwise. For although the world exists in an objective sense, as far as I am concerned it will disappear along with my consciousness. One of the philosophers said, " The World is Myself." He went too far. The world is not myself ; but the perception of the world is myself.

" By killing my physical being I am killing my consciousness. I have a perfect right to kill it, in view of my origin and the painful sense of the rot in my blood.

" You people will be saying that I'm doing

my family—my father and my more or less existing brother—a grave injury. Well, I'm sneezing at all and everything—at you, and at my father and at my brother, and at hell and the devil. I shan't be there. Therefore, there will be nothing.

" When a scorpion is surrounded by fire it kills itself with its own tail. Only I'm not a simple scorpion—I'm a triangular one (it's a new variety ; tell your nat. history circle about it ; you may get something for your discovery). I'm surrounded by the fire of my own angles.

" After all, the world is stewed in its own juice. I mean, humanity is. This thought makes materialism so bitter. Yet no self-respecting person could become an idealist on account of it.

" A mathematical and inevitable chance (the contradiction in terms merely shows the subtlety of the idea) has driven a group of atoms and molecules along a road that is called life. At some point this road stops—hence, it has been in vain. Life is only the rationalisation of an absurdity. Pleasure and enjoyment are its aim, and this aim must be made available to everybody, including the lowest *lumpenproletariat* in the world. This is the basis of my revolutionary doctrine.

" But I'm reaching the point which my will has selected ; and my will is boundless. Live

happily, Riabtsov—if you know how to do it. However, you're a round and oily ball, and will pass, like a croquet-ball, through all the gates.

If my brother ever turns up and is interested in my notes and poems, give them to him ; don't give them to my Father under any circumstances.

" With a comrade's respectful greeting,

" Ex-Prince, now Scorpion,

" Victor Shahovskoy."

I thought the letter over carefully, and came to the following conclusions. Shahovskoy was crushed by his birth and origin. And that's a hopeless thing. With such thoughts on his mind, he was bound sooner or later to commit suicide.

But how far could his outlook apply to me, too ? The question is reasonable, because I also am a convinced materialist.

One's consciousness naturally comes to an end with death. But there is a great distance between the recognition of this fact and the desire to die. Indeed, if one is satisfied with one's life and consciousness, suicide becomes absurd. Hence my conclusion that Shahovskoy hated life, and lied (or wrongly imagined) that he had a definite aim—even a revolutionary one. He

simply hated his life and all that surrounded it ; he hated himself, and therefore found himself in the position of the scorpion. I have had many talks with my friends as to whether suicide is a sign of strength or of weakness. But, after studying this letter, I have come to the clear conclusion that it's a sign of weakness.

Let me take an example. We have some violent discussions at our shooting circle about a possible war with Poland. The main topic is the respective strength of our infantry and theirs and whether (in the case of war) the Red Army could be defeated. (The war is possible, for the British imperialists, with Chamberlain at their head, are doing their best to incite Poland to war—and in Poland, too, the bourgeois are at the head of things.) The Polish infantry is organised in such a way that each platoon has four ordinary machine-guns, this being the total firing capacity of their infantry. In our infantry the firing capacity is concentrated in a special machine-gun platoon armed with automatic machine-guns. If we compare a regular Polish platoon with one of ours, we find that ours will be weaker ; but, on the other hand, each of our individual squads will be stronger than the corresponding party in the Polish Army. Further, the Polish infantry is trained for offensive warfare, rather than for defence. (That's natural, of course, for it is *they* who would attack us.) But their defensive methods

are also active—for, supposing we capture their trenches, they are bound to answer with a bayonet counter-attack. All this shows that they are far from being a negligible enemy. (All the same, we are certain to win in the end, for we know what we'll be fighting for, while they don't.) Well, suppose I stand all alone beside an automatic machine-gun (the others have been killed or driven back) and the Poles, with their hand-grenades, have surrounded me on all sides. What would I do ? As Shahovskoy says, a scorpion kills himself when surrounded by fire. That would be exactly my position. Will I kill myself ? Certainly not. I'll go on firing till the last cartridge is spent—in the interval my comrades may come and rescue me. Then I'll use my bayonet, and only after I'm completely exhausted shall I surrender. For, even as a war prisoner, I can be of use to the workers and peasants. That's to say, of course, if I'm not killed first. But by killing myself inside that ring, I admit that I've been defeated to the last *n*th degree, and that I'm of no further use. In other words, it'll show that I'm not strong, but weak, and it is the weak who perish in the struggle for existence.

But am I really strong ? Perhaps not ; but I have the whole strength of materialism and Communism behind me, and I don't feel as lonely as Shahovskoy.

Strangely enough, I feel sorry for Shahovskoy,

all the same. He could have been of great use if only it hadn't been for his aristocratic origin.[1]

August 26 :

I went to Vanka's factory yesterday, and found them having a great discussion at the factory committee room. They've got a committee chairman called Fedorov, who was trying to squash Vanka.

" Don't you understand," he said, " that, if they take all the activists away, the cultural work at the factories will stop. What's the sense in stopping a machine in the middle of work ? The fellows and girls have only begun to take an active interest in things—and now our chief organiser is going to become a student ! I know it's education and all that, and you'll have some damned professors giving you lectures—and, after you've been there for a while, you'll stop talking like an ordinary human being. It's all very well, only why should we get into a mess over it ? They might have waited for a year or two—it's certainly quite the wrong time for it now." " It's quite true," the Zykova girl said sadly ; " the work will go to waste when you are gone. No one has the same influence as you. Take Gerasimova. Who could possibly handle

[1] This is followed by a number of poems and " Masonic " reflections from Shahov's notebook. They are of no interest. (Translator's note.)

her ? She's started a carry-on with Galkin now."

" Oh, chuck it ! " said Vanka angrily. " How is it you people can't understand the simplest things ? Just think what you're saying—would you call it a Marxist discussion ? First of all, there is nothing permanent in this world—things go on changing and taking on new forms—shall I teach you the A B C all over again ? The young generation is growing up. You've got to take a young fellow and develop the new mentality in him ; and it's time you managed without a permanent instructor. Damn it, am I to be your nurse ? Don't you realise it's an idealistic attitude to want a nurse, to place a personality at the head of things. What kind of nurses can the proletariat have—and where are you to get them ? You're making an unnecessary fuss. I'll be working at the Economic Institute, while you'll continue your industrial work. Zykova and Brychev ought to be sent to the labour faculty."

" That's right ! " Pashka Brychev shouted. " We've been talking bunk. Vanka and—the rest of us ought to get educated ! "

" Is it hard for you to leave the factory?" I asked Vanka after the others had left. " ' Hard,' ' A pity,' " said Vanka sharply. " It's time you chucked such words. Where did you get them from ? Turgenev ? We've got to do anything that is *rational*, anything meeting the needs of the moment, and feel accordingly.

You're a queer bird," he added, looking suspiciously at me. "It's time you, too, pulled yourself together. Are you doing your six hours ? "

" Not yet."

" You had better hurry up. Time won't wait."

I suppose he's right ; but it's only a few days till work begins.

September 3 :

Father is still ill, and I went again to Voskresensk to see my aunt about money. In the train home, I met the shepherd who had helped me to find my clothes last summer. He was going into town also.

" Is your work over ? " I asked him.

" No, not yet, but I must go to town. It's very hard, especially as I've nowhere to stay."

" How much will you get for the summer ? "

" A hundred roubles in money, food, and shoe leather. It isn't much—they should be paying from 3 to 5 roubles per head of cattle, but I'm not greedy. It'll do me all right, and I'll find some more work later."

" Where are you staying ? "

" Nowhere. Wherever I get a chance."

" Still, you couldn't sleep in the street."

" If it comes to the worst, why not? A bench on the boulevard's all right."

In the meantime a man without a nose and, with him, a boy all in tatters and holding a cap

in his hand, came into the carriage ; and the boy went round with his cap begging for the blind man. The face of the blind, noseless man was very red, and you could see that he was drunk. When they came to us, the blind man suddenly tottered and sat down on the shepherd's knees.

" Look out, you devil," the shepherd said ; " can't you stand on your feet ! "

" Who are you to teach me ? " the blind man said. " For all you know, I may have been to twenty-five wars, and have shed my blood, and have lost my eyes with the poisonous gases. So I won't have any cheeky little devils like you teaching me ! "

" I'm not teaching you, only I don't like you to sit on top of me."

" Listen to the fine gentleman ! " said the blind man. " If you aren't comfortable here, why don't you travel in a motor-car ? Lousy little fellow like you talking to me ! "

" If you are blind, how do you know I'm little and lousy ? " said the shepherd.

" What does it matter whether I am blind or not ? I haven't got a nose either, and you've got one. What right have you to go about with a nose, when I haven't got a nose ? Can I hit you or can't I ? Come on ! answer my question ! Is there equality now, or isn't there ? Tell me this—is it equality or inequality ? "

The passengers were listening, and some even came in from the other compartments.

" You're a poor invalid, and yet you won't leave me alone. How can you hit me if you can't see me ? You had better run along."

" You say I can't hit you ! " the blind man said. " I'll just show you ! "

He grabbed the shepherd by the chest and gave him a shaking. Here the shepherd gave him a blow on the arm, and the blind man went bang on the floor and roared :

" I'm an epileptic ! I'm an epileptic ! Help me ! Help ! "

The conductor came running along and led him away. Many of the passengers were indignant with the shepherd for having hit a blind man. But, without taking any notice of the people, he said to me :

" He isn't blind at all. He can see as well as you and me. I've read a lot of books during the past summer, and there was one I carried about for three days trying to make it out. Is there a writer called Leonti Andreyev ? "

" Leonid Andreyev. We read his *Red Laughter* at school. Terrible bunk."

" Very well, Leonid then. He's got a story called *Darkness*. You haven't read it ? It's about a political offender who was running away from the police and found shelter by staying with a prostitute. He was a bachelor and didn't care for women. He was so proud of it that he boasted about his chastity to the prostitute, and she said to him : " How dare you be good when

I'm a bad woman ? " Just like this blind man. If he got infected and lost his nose, does it mean that everybody else ought to go about without a nose ? Leonti was talking nonsense. These people ought to be sent to special camps for treatment, and not be allowed to hang around railway carriages. I don't understand how a man could write such a story and ever get it printed. I wrote about life and it was turned down."

" What did you write about life? " I inquired.

" All kinds of things. I wrote about the Forestry Department, and said it was inefficient. Also about a former landowner who was driven out and then came back again. They sent me an answer, saying the local executive knew about it and that it was all right. I can't understand it, seeing that landowners have been done away with. There's something wrong."

" You ought to join a circle of village correspondents."

" I know, but I've no time."

Here the blind man's boy came back and sang a song, which I took down :

Won't you listen, good people ?
I have eaten no bread.
Won't you help me, good people,
To pay for a bed ?
At home, in the village,
We waited for rain,

But the sun kept on shining,
And we waited in vain.
My mother and sisters
All started to cry :
" Oh, where are the clouds
That will water the rye ? "
" My poor little boy,"
My poor mother said,
" We'll die in the winter,
For there will be no bread."
So I said, " Farewell, mother,
And father, good-bye,
I am going to town
To live or to die."
Now at night I play cards,
In the daytime I roam
And sing to the people
Of the hunger at home.

When the boy went round with his hat after the song, the shepherd called him and began to talk to him. The boy answered his questions reluctantly and was obviously in a hurry to go to the other carriages. But the shepherd persevered and tried to catch him by the hand. But the boy wrenched himself away and dashed off.

" We ought to get hold of him," said the shepherd.

" What'll you do with him ? "

" I shan't do anything with him, but we could send him to the *Children's Friends* Society, where they'll give him some work."

" It's quite hopeless," I said, remembering my past experience with the strays.

" It isn't hopeless at all. They organise children's orchestras now. . . . You help me to catch him at the station." But two miles before we came to the station the boy jumped off the running train—and that was the last we saw of him.

September 9 :

I wandered about the passages of the University for a long time to-day. There are still very few people there—hardly anybody. A fellow with spectacles came up to me and asked : " Do you belong to this town, or are you from the country ? "

I told him I belonged to the town, and he asked if I could put him up for the night. He has been transferred here from Leningrad. I got the impression that he wasn't a freshman, and asked him how old he was.

" Why, is it so noticeable ? " he said. " I know. I'm not an infant. I've been hanging about Universities for about ten years, and still can't find a suitable speciality." This was a question that interested me, and we started talking, and later I took him home. His entire belongings consist of a rather shabby blanket. He had been on the geographical faculty in Leningrad and had studied law in Kazan before

that. " What are you going to take here ? " I asked him. " I'm going to join the medical faculty," he said, with an air of importance. Altogether, he tries to look very important, in spite of his spectacles and his small size.

" One must respect one's self," he said. " It's the only way of making other people respect you, too."

" But what if the medical school doesn't satisfy you ? "

" I haven't tried ethnography, administrative law, or economics yet," said Korepanov-Guskovsky (for such was his remarkable name).

At home, Father asked him about his parents.

" I'm of mixed origin," he said. " My father was a priest and my mother an actress, and I still don't know what I'm going to be myself. I'll study for another five or six years, and then I'll see."

" What were you doing during the Civil War ? " I asked him.

" Everything. At first I did some fighting ; then I worked in a hospital ; then I travelled on a propaganda train ; then I cooked for the Whites ; then I was a bomb-thrower in the Red Army."

" And did you study all the time ? "

" When I had time, yes. I always carry books with me."

Indeed, when we went to bed—I had put a

mattress on the floor for him—he unrolled his blanket and took out five books, which he put carefully beside his pillow, then he took off his trousers, folded them carefully, and put them under the mattress. I laughed.

"Don't laugh," said Father, "he is quite right. The crease is the most important part in a pair of trousers, and that's the best way to keep them in shape."

"I'm not doing it on account of the crease," said Korepanov, lying down and opening one of his books. "It's simply a matter of economy. These trousers are five years old. If I didn't fold and clean them, they would have been done long ago. And how could I afford a new pair? My stipend isn't enough, and I'm not strong enough to work on the railroad." We had been in bed for some time when he suddenly burst out laughing.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"This damned German," Korepanov laughed, "declares that women have no soul and can therefore have no genius."

"That's very true," Father growled. "I've never yet seen a woman with a soul."

"What are you reading?"

"It's by that German Weininger, and it's called *Sex and Character*."

"If it's about sex, let me read it too. . . . But I'm surprised at you, Father! You've lived a whole lifetime and won't treat women as

equals. It shows a lack of political conscience."

"You're still a child. If you had seen as many women as I have, you wouldn't be talking like that."

September 15 :

To-day we had Professor Fedorovsky's first lecture on Soviet law. The fellows had spoken very highly of him, and he really turned out to be a first-rate speaker. His first lecture coincided with many of my views.

"Suppose," Fedorovsky said, "that a man came in here and began from the outset to curse the present-day life of Russia. This man may be an *émigré* or an embittered landowner who has lost all his property. He will maintain that there are no laws in the U.S.S.R., and that everything is based on graft and lawlessness. Whatever arguments you may bring forward, he will still keep to his own views, because his whole mentality—which is a capitalist mentality—is built up on the past, and so is unable to adapt itself to modern conditions. And, if you ask him point-blank what he has lost in the past, he will never say that he has lost his property or his titles, or his social position or his job, which gave him three hundred pre-war roubles a month ; he will say he has lost Russia. He will say that the Bolsheviks have ruined that abstract Russia, that old Russia where laws functioned

perfectly, and that there are no laws at all in the Russia of to-day. You will find plenty of brilliant arguments to convince you of the contrary, but you can never convince such an opponent. But, seeing we are on the question of Russia, I must illustrate my point from biology.

" Russia is undergoing a great shaking process. This process is at times brutal and absurd, but that doesn't matter. Russia is being awakened—that is the important point. You can't say now, as you could fifty years ago, that ' Holy Russia, with her head resting on the North Pole and her heels on the Caucasus, is sleeping, never to wake.' She is being violently shaken with tractors, aeroplanes, and electrification, and at last, after the centuries of sleep, that weak and powerful country called Holy Orthodox Russia is beginning to open her eyes.

" I have mentioned biology. A certain Soviet scientist has been experimenting with an axolotl. The axolotl is a kind of tadpole, belonging, if I am not mistaken, to the triton species. The lungs of this tadpole are quite undeveloped, and this constitutes the main difference between it and the amblistome, a more highly developed form of the species. By feeding the axolotl on thyroid, the scientist succeeded in transforming the axolotl into an amblistome. I don't think it will be too far-fetched if I compare the institution of Soviet law and its penetration into the masses—i.e.

the organisation of a new legal mentality—to the biological process."

Here Fedorovsky began to compare Soviet law with international law, and he did it so well that we all applauded. But at the end of the lecture a tall, red-haired fellow in a militia uniform suddenly walked up to the professor's chair. I had noticed him before, and was surprised to see a militiaman in the University. It was only under Tsarism that policemen were stationed there, in order to beat the students who went in for politics.

"What is it, comrade?" Fedorovsky asked.

"It's about—the axolotl," said the militiaman, with an embarrassed look.

"What about it?"

"You said that the axolotl could be transformed into an amblistome, if fed on thyroid gland. But there is another way as well.

"I didn't know that," said Fedorovsky. "There have only been very few experiments, and most of them have failed. Still, although this has nothing to do with my lecture, tell us what you know about another method of transformation."

"It's like this," said the militiaman. "You've got to change the biological environment. I've done it myself. Why don't the lungs of the axolotl develop? Because there is oxygen in the water and in the plants one finds in aquariums. The oxygen must be removed."

" How did you remove it ? "

" It's quite simple. One's got to add boiled water to the aquarium and take away the plants. That's what I did."

" Well, and did the axolotl die ? " Fedorovsky asked, with a smile.

" No ! " the militiaman cried, striking the table with his fist. " It survived ! That's just the point ! It developed lungs and became an amblistome."

" Well——" said Fedorovsky. " But didn't you torture it ? "

" Of course I tortured it," said the militiaman reluctantly. " But I reached my aim. I created a higher form of life. I've still got the amblistome, and it's still alive."

" But why are you wearing this uniform ? " the Professor asked. " You are a student, aren't you ? "

" Yes, I'm studying here. But I'm also in the militia. I had nothing to eat, so the trade union labour exchange put me down on their administrative lists."

" That's splendid ! " said Fedorovsky. " Well, what this comrade has just told us only confirms my point of view once more. A clear and reasonable scientific idea will always find its way to the light in spite of all difficulties and impediments. And, of course, the new legal mentality is penetrating into the masses in a thousand different ways, but in the end it will

kindle the beacon which has always been the aim and ideal of the greatest minds in every nation—a radical cultural revolution, which will sweep into the ash-heap all the old moth-eaten conceptions of law. You're a splendid fellow, comrade," said Fedorovsky, slapping the militiaman on the shoulder. " Always seek out new ways, and don't follow authorities blindly. You have made an amblistome, living on hard militia bread yourself. What could you achieve if you were fed on thyroid gland ! "

" He'll be a *narkom*[1] all right ! " someone shouted from the back of the hall, and the militiaman crawled carefully down the platform.

September 20 :

There's a fellow at the University called Korsuntsev. He stays at the Mozhaïka hostel, and that is where I first met him. He is studying Soviet law and wants to become an " administrator," and a very big one, for, as he says himself, there is a great demand for good administrators in the U.S.S.R., and only very few are available. I believe Korsuntsev will make a good one, possibly even on a big scale. In the first place, he is a wonderful speaker, and when he talks, people listen to him with gaping mouths. Moreover, he is a very good observer.

[1] People's Commissar.

For instance, yesterday we were walking down the street when a well-dressed citizen, with a lady, suddenly stopped. Korsuntsev and I stopped too. It appeared that a labourer was bringing up some long iron rods out of a basement to lay them on his cart, and one couldn't get past while he was dragging one out. We stood there for a minute, and the well-dressed citizen said : " Can't you hurry up, carter ? " The labourer stopped, and, looking at him, said : " You can wait, clerk."

Here Korsuntsev roared with laughter, so that everybody turned round, and the lady turned round too, saying disdainfully : " He must be drunk."

" No, madam, I am not drunk," said Korsuntsev, " but I am greatly interested to observe the class consciousness of the masses, even in its smallest manifestations. That's all." That's the way he talks.

" Remember this, Riabtsov," he said.

" There is hardly a man in the U.S.S.R. who hasn't the same sense of dignity as that carter." That's very true—remarkably true. The truth of some of Korsuntsev's casual sayings is astounding. He is tall and has dark, curly hair, and looks like a toreador.

September 21 :

This is going to be a terrible period of my life. Father is certain to die within the next few days.

I asked Aleshka Cheekin what he thought of death. " About death ? " he said. " In the first place, I have no intention of dying—something will be invented to make it possible. But, if I die—well, I'll just die. Only I'd like to do it on the battlefield with a rifle in my hand. And there must be music."

" That's not what I mean. I believe that death, like life, is a purely biological phenomenon. If a man dies, he dissolves into atoms and tiny electrons throughout the universe, and then these electrons assemble again, and this creates matter, and matter is the source of all life. You remember Almakfish's explanation."

" Yes, well—— ? "

" Well, I wonder whether it is possible for the electrons which constituted one single body to reassemble in exactly the same way ? A human body, for instance. Or *me* ? Do you think such a process possible ? "

" I'm damned if I know," said Aleshka. " But I believe that when a thing is lost, it's lost. You shouldn't worry about it. You yourself say it's a biological process—so what's the good of discussing it ? "

" But are you afraid of death ? " I asked him that, because during the past few days I feel as though someone was holding my heart in a cold hand—it must be the thought of Father's death. Is it the fear of death ? If it isn't, what other fear can there be ?

"No," said Aleshka, "I don't think I'm afraid. When I lived with the strays in their tumble-down basement,[1] one of the boys died. He just fizzled out, all of a sudden, without any warning. The boys dragged him out of the corner to the fire, and warmed him and rubbed him, but he still remained cold. The trouble was that while he lay there he showed his teeth and looked as though he were laughing. None of us believed that he was quite dead until he began to stink. It was only then that we dragged him into a close and dropped him there. But no one was frightened—in fact, we played cards all the time."

"I also believe it's silly to be afraid of death," said I, after a moment's reflection. But it's quite a different thing when someone you are fond of is dying—take Father, for instance. You can't very well stand by his bedside and argue that it's matter that will dissolve according to such and such a process. Besides, there are some other questions connected with it. For instance, while he was well, I didn't take much notice of him, somehow; I mean, I did take notice of him, and was even quite fond of him, but, on the whole, I lived my own life, and he didn't have any place in it. It's a pity. For although Father's convictions differ from mine —he's got quite a different ideology—I could easily have talked more to him and consulted him about various things.

[1] See *Communist Schoolboy*

September 23 :

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BOOK II

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BOOK II

September 25 :

I have just come back from my aunt's, at Voskresensk. She cried a lot, and kept wondering how I would manage all on my own. It's difficult for me to see clearly ahead at present, for with Father's death everything has changed.

Aunt gave me 30 roubles.

September 28 :

I met Nikpetozh to-day, and looked at him a little suspiciously, for ever since his speech I have had the impression (though I have no way of proving it) that he had something to do with Victor Shahovskoy's suicide. I told him, among other things, that I was going on the lit. faculty. (But I didn't tell him why.)

" God preserve you from it ! " Nikpetozh exclaimed (although I don't need any god to preserve me). " Why, Kostya, wouldn't you rather be an engineer ? "

" No, I wouldn't," I answered, and the thought of maths. crossed my mind. " The very thought of logarithms gives me a pain. Why should I be an engineer ? "

" Why ? Why ? " he exclaimed, and began to

fidget. (I've noticed how fidgety he becomes at the least little thing nowadays.) " Don't you see, Kostya, what's happening around us ? You are a modern man, and yet you ask me why you should become an engineer ? Why, all the reconstruction, all the radio, electrification, rationalisation, all that has been accomplished so far, is only an atom of what is to come. This vast country is waiting for gigantic development in the way of continuous and powerful constructive work. Such work will go on for forty or fifty years, and will demand the co-operation of an enormous number of people. And the men must be trained. If we don't teach the masses to read, if we don't develop electrification and co-operation on a large scale, the masses will turn against us, and kick us in the backside. And they'll be in the right. You remember *who* said that ? And you come along and talk about literature ! "

" You've just said yourself ' teach the people to read.' "

" Read—yes, but not literature, my dear Kostya." (I hate him when he calls me ' my dear.') " Under no circumstances must you look at modern life through literary spectacles, —nor, especially, must you teach other people to do so. What can you teach the young generation coming after you—young boys like the *pioneers* with whom you had to deal in your Outpost ? Are you going to tell them that

Eugene Oneghin was the first in the series of "superfluous people." Or that Tolstoy felt a longing for a patriarchal society and natural economy, in the same way as young girls long for sour cabbage after eating too many cakes? Or do you believe that anyone nowadays is interested in Dostoievsky's spiritual jugglery? Or that the new generation cares anything about Chekhov's drivellers? You are wrong, Kostya! People may read it all, and enjoy it —only there is no more need for it. It really only concerns literary professionals, literary specialists, and bookworms. These literary spectacles have been the ruin of the *intelligentsia* many a time, so why put them on again? People must have healthy eyes and look at life without wearing the literary veil over their faces!"

"Do you mean, then, that there is no more need for the old literature at all? That's what you are saying." (I said it very sarcastically, for what the hell did Nikpetozh teach us literature for?)

"You see, it's this way, Kostya. The serious study of literature leads people to self-analysis and self-penetration. That isn't a bad thing, if the man has a will of his own, and doesn't let it affect him any more than, say, the cinema. But if he overdoes it and looks for the question 'how to live' not in life, but in books—books like Tolstoy, for instance—his life becomes a

literary and not a vital thing, and the literary spectacles lead to no good. Remember Chekhov's heroes, or any old intellectual, for that matter, or even try to analyse Victor Shahovskoy."

"I remember Victor well, Nicolai Petrovich," I said emphatically. "Only I suspect some other reasons there." I looked Nikpetozh straight in the face. It seemed to me that he grew embarrassed and looked the other way. I may, however, be wrong. We were silent for a minute, and then he asked very softly:

"What do you suspect?"

"Oh, nothing special. Still, am I to understand that one mustn't read at all?"

"Oh, that's nonsense! I only maintain that it is wrong to make a cult of literature and to have recourse to it on every occasion, as our intellectuals did. But, of course, it's necessary to read, only one must read systematically, and without confusing literature and life."

"Zin-Palna," I said, "thinks quite differently. She says that from literature we can learn the most vital experiences of life that others have collected for us."

"Facts are one thing, but the author's conclusions are quite another matter. But, of course, this is just an ordinary discussion, and I am not trying to impose upon you any of my opinions."

Here we parted. Nikpetozh's talk is woolly, and it's hard to make out whether he believes

in literature or not. I believe he's got badly muddled. He reminds me of a lecturer I once heard at the factory club. He used foreign words all the time, and none of us could understand him. In the end one of the fellows stood up and asked : " What is *apperception* ? " " It's—it's," the lecturer mumbled, " Well, you see, it's rather difficult to explain it all at once. It is a general term combining many different ideas, and it's very hard to give a brief definition of it."

No one (including myself) understood a damned thing. Nikpetozh talks of literature in the same way. (This surprises me, for at school he was always very clear, and his remarks fitted perfectly into each other.)

October 1 :

I'll have to clear out of my room one of these days, as the house is going to be pulled down. I don't know where to go and I have hardly any money left.

I've sent in an application to the hostel, but I don't know if anything will come of it. Also another application for the stipend.

October 3 :

I called for Korsuntsev at the Mozhaïka hostel this morning. It was very early, and most of the fellows were still asleep. Only one of them

was lying on his back and smoking *mahorka* for all he was worth, and another was lying on his belly with his hands over his ears, busy swotting something.

" You could cut it with a knife," said Korsuntsev after I had wakened him. " This students' hostel is more like a poison-gas factory. In the morning you know exactly the lunch-room menu of the day before. . . . Get up, you b——s ! " he shouted, throwing a pillow at the fellow nearest him. " Get up, Carapet,[1] you excrement of a noble highlander, or I'll pull away your blanket ! "

" Do you know the latest puzzle about the plague ? " said the Armenian, sticking his Oriental head from under the blanket.

" What riddle ? Come on, tell us—only it's got to be a funny one, or else you'll have to go out and get the hot water."

" It's a new riddle—ver-ry witty riddle. What is it ? . . . Cloth all round, and the plague in the middle ? "

" Well ? "

" Don't you know ? Korsuntsev with a blanket round him."

" So that's your puzzle ! " Korsuntsev cried, jumping on to the Caucasian's bed. Some others joined them, and the brawl lasted for several minutes. Suddenly a Chinaman popped his head through the door crying : " Come on

[1] The proverbial name for an Armenian.

get youl shirts, hankichiffs, socks, linel, togethil, the laundly maid's outside."

"Ah, here's Yu-Sian! Chang-Tso-Lin! Cigarga-Barasm!" the fellows shouted.

"Come on, brothers, the Chinaman wants your washing," cried one of them.

"Hully up with the washing!" the Chinaman said. "When will you give me the louble you bollowed?"

They all laughed. Korsuntsev dressed and came out with me. In the passage we met the charwoman with a red scarf, carrying a brush. Korsuntsev winked at me and put his arm round her waist.

"Stop it, Korsuntsev!" she cried, and nearly hit him with the brush.

"Will you be in the passage to-night?" he whispered to her, without minding me. "You'll come, won't you?" he said, pushing her into a corner.

"What passage!" the charwoman cried in a high unnatural voice. "You devil! Have you forgotten Manya already!"

"What about Manya?" said Korsuntsev in a strange tender voice. "What about her? It's you I want—not Manya. So you'll come?"

"Don't stick to me like a thistle!" she laughed in feigned anger. "Why do you want me—am I golden, or what?"

"You are better than golden!" said

Korsuntsev warmly. "You aren't a girl—you're a queen ! I shall wait for you here about twelve. Come along, Riabtsov."

"Why do you bother her ? " said I as we walked into the street. "You won't love her and you won't marry her, so why can't you leave her alone ? " I felt very envious—that's why I asked him.

"Oh," said Korsuntsev, "life would be too short if one married everybody. It's no good being too squeamish in these matters. Remember the saying : 'Aim at all the crows and you may hit an eagle.' "

"How's that ? "

"Well, you just mustn't be soft with females. Get what you can."

I hadn't time to talk to him any longer on the subject, for I had more important matters to ask him about.

"Tell me, Korsuntsev," I said, "do you believe they'll admit me to the hostel and give me a stipend—and, if not, what am I to do ? " This was a far more vital question to me than girls.

"Persevere ; run about and see people," he said. "Water won't run under a lying stone. All the same, keep in mind that you can fail even if you do your damnedest. So as not to become disappointed, you've got to create for yourself a mental immunity."

"What's that ? "

" That's to say, you've got to insure yourself psychologically against all failures. Somewhere at the bottom of your heart you must go on believing. But pretend to yourself that you don't, and always be prepared for the worst. Say to yourself that you'll neither be admitted here, nor be granted a stipend. And, should it really not come off, the blow won't seem so hard."

" And if I get what I want it'll be all the more pleasant," said I. " Only it's difficult to see how one can believe and yet not believe at the same time."

" Well, look at it this way. One part of your self believes, while the other doesn't. When necessary, you let the one prevail over the other. When you talk to people who can do things for you pretend to them you have no doubts at all as to the justice of your claim, and that they *must* grant your request at all costs ; at the same time keep on saying to yourself : 'They are sure to turn me down, they're bound to turn me down.' I call that psychological insurance."

" That's a damn good idea," said I. " I must remember to try it in all difficult cases."

At the University there was no answer about either the stipend or the hostel, and they only told me to come again. As I had already prepared myself for a refusal, the delay had quite a pleasant effect.

October 5 :

It is nearly three weeks since Father died, and I am still unable to see my way clearly. The point is, that I have left one basis—the school—and haven't yet reached the new basis of the University. The collective body which supported me psychologically at school has ceased to exist. And sometimes, especially at night, I regret terribly that past period of my life. At the University, of course, there is a much larger and much more powerful corporate body than at school, only I haven't yet found my place in it. I've tried to speak at meetings and seminars, but it was a failure—at least, so it seemed to me—for, apart from some perfectly ignorant speakers, there are some very brilliant ones as well, with far more sense and knowledge than anyone we ever had at school. It's hard for me to catch up.

I spend the six hours of compulsory social work in the Young Correspondents' circle. We write articles for the *Young Generation*, and discuss them. This agrees well with my psychology, for I feel I can be a writer.

But my main difficulties lie in more personal matters : I have no money. The 30 roubles that aunt gave me are gone, and I don't know what to do if I don't get the stipend. I tried to find some work, but that's very difficult.

October 10 :

I must have had a very hungry look while I was standing in one of the passages in the University, for a girl came up to me and said :

" Had no dinner to-day, boy ? "

" You're right," I said.

" Come along then."

" Where to ? "

" You shall see. We'll make some money." I followed her as far as a cinema. It was a dirty little cinema, but there was a big crowd outside. They were showing *Aëlita*.

" Why the hell should I go in there ? " I said. " I've seen it already, and, in any case, it's no fun watching pictures on an empty stomach."

" You just follow me and don't argue. As they say at our hostel, 'Listen to Vera, and you will be all right.' Vera, that's me."

She pulled two coupons out of her pocket and waited.

Soon after, a citizen holding a lady's arm came walking along. Vera went up to them. " Citizens, what price of tickets do you wish ? " The man grew embarrassed and looked at his lady[1] : " I—I don't know. At a rouble—or dearer ? "

But the lady said : " No, no, a rouble's quite

[1] " Lady " (*dama*), when used by Communists, denotes, as distinct from " citizen " (*grazhdanka*), a woman of an undesirable, more or less bourgeois type.

dear enough. Why waste money?" Here the citizen suddenly shouted: "What business of yours is it, anyway?" And gave Vera a stern look. Vera pulled me by the sleeve and said: "This comrade and I have booked tickets, but we aren't going. Give me the money, I'll get you your tickets at once."

Here the lady scrutinised Vera from head to foot and said:

"They ought to be sent to the militia station."

But here Vera pounced at her:

"What? The militia station? What for? You have no business to talk like that, citizen! It's perfectly scandalous! I am offering to get you tickets without your having to stand in the queue, and you take us for swindlers. What reason have you for saying it?"

Then the citizen said to his lady:

"Yes, you really haven't any reason!"

And he was going to take out the money. But the lady cried at the pitch of her voice: "No, this isn't the first time it's happened. Maria Davidovna has told me about it, and she says that people like these ought to be sent to the militia station at once."

Here Vera jumped at her again, and, with her hands in her pockets, cried, "All right, come on to the militia station. Why aren't you coming? Aha! You've got frightened! What are you threatening us for then? Come on, quick!"

At the same time she was trembling all over. I didn't know what to do, I felt so embarrassed. The lady looked round and round, and, realising she couldn't do anything, pulled the citizen by the arm, and they both went away.

" Oh, to hell with them ! " said Vera ; and shouted after them : " Don't forget to tell Maria Davidovna that she's a bloody f-fool ! " . . . " Well," said she to me, " it hasn't come off this time. And, do you know, if they'd really called the militia, we would have got into hot water. Only let's get away from here—everybody's watching us."

As we went along, I said to her : " But, listen, isn't this cheating ? Doesn't it look as if we were picking people's pockets ? "

" There's no cheating at all," said Vera. " They pay money, the cinema gets the coupons that have also been paid for, and you're a fool. So keep quiet."

We came to another cinema. There was a queue for the booking-office there too. A minute later we saw a comrade, with glasses and wearing a leather jacket, coming along with a youngster of fifteen or so. Vera walked up to them.

" What price of tickets do you want ? "

The fellow must have guessed, for he laughed heartily and said :

" Are you making money, comrade ? "

Vera answered calmly :

" No, this comrade and I had meant to go, but we've changed our minds. What tickets do you want ? "

" At 85 copecks," said the comrade gaily. " Two tickets. Here's the money." Vera rushed to the booking-office, while the queue yelled at her : " Eh, citizen, line up in the queue. You can't do that ! Take your turn."

Vera looked round and said : " I don't need to take my turn. I've a perfect right to change these tickets."

For some reason they said nothing. (If I had been in the queue I wouldn't have kept quiet.) Vera slipped her head into the window, and the next moment she appeared with the tickets in her hand.

" Here you are. Two seats in the sixth row. Here's your change."

The citizen looked very amiably at her and said : " That's a good girl ! What University are you ? "

" Third State University. Let's go."

The citizen cried after her :

" Eh, comrade ! There's no such University."

Without looking round, Vera cried :

" Never mind, there'll be one some day."

When we walked round the corner, Vera counted the silver and asked :

" What do you prefer—sausage or cheese ? "

" I'd rather have sausage."

" Well, we've earned 90 copecks—so don't

talk about cheating. The coupons were 40 each, which I had to borrow. If we put these 80 aside, we've got a clear profit of 90 copecks. It's no good buying it in the shop—they've got no student sausage. Let's go to the booth."

At the booth we bought two and a half pounds at 20 copecks a pound, two pounds of bread, four sweets for a copeck, eleven copecks' worth of Chervonetz cigarettes, two boxes of matches, and two salt cucumbers.

" Now let's have a feast at your place," said Vera. " Where are you living and what's your name ? "

I told her.

" It's just as well you're not at a hostel," said Vera joyfully.

" Have you never been caught ? " I asked.

" Oh, yes, I have," she laughed. " A lady —like the one we saw to-day—once caught on to me and started yelling, and unfortunately there was a *milton* [1] close by. He came up and caught me by the sleeve and asked what was wrong. I showed him my University ticket, but the lady still kept on yelling that I was going to rob her. So I had to go to the militia station. I nearly cried with fright, only meantime the show had come to an end and a large crowd came out of the cinema. I gave a tug and dived into the crowd. The *milton* got stuck in the crowd, so that I managed to slip round the

[1] Slang for militiaman.

corner. Here I came to myself and realised that I was wrong to have run away, and that I should have insisted on going to the militia station with the lady. She couldn't have proved anything, anyway, and I would have had a good chance to sit on her. There's nothing worse than ladies."

We arrived at my little room, placed all our parcels on the table, and began to feast. When everything was finished, Vera said :

" Now I'm going to sit on your knee."

" All right—if you aren't too heavy."

" You just tell me when you are tired," said Vera, sitting down and beginning to argue : " Weren't you a fool with your ' cheating ' ? "

" No, I still feel there's something wrong. Whatever way you look at it, somebody's been the loser. We are spending other people's money."

" Money," said Vera, " is a heritage of bourgeois society. Besides, hasn't there been labour ? And labour must be paid for. There was both physical and mental work. If we'd lain in bed and waited for the sausage to fall into our mouths, it would have been quite different. Don't moralise on an empty stomach. However, we've had plenty to eat, so let's mor-al-ise now by all means ! "

She said it so nicely that I couldn't help kissing her. She got off my knee at once and said in a changed voice :

" Don't joke like that. Well, good-bye for the present. You can come to our hostel when you feel like it."

October 15 :

Korsuntsev came to see me yesterday, and, seeing I hadn't had a meal for two days, he said : " Well, what can I do with you ? Let's go to a place where they'll give you a feed. Only it would be a good thing if you could dance the foxtrot."

My eyes nearly fell out.

" Can *you* do it ? " I asked.

" I can do everything," he said. " A man's lost nowadays if he can't do everything. Haven't you got another pair of trousers ? "

" I was just going to sell them."

" Well I'm damned ! You haven't had a feed for two days, and you haven't sold them yet ! Here, stand up like this." He put his arm round my waist and began to teach me the foxtrot. I kept stepping on his toes, for I had never danced before, and despised all dancing.

" What a clumsy bear you are," he cursed. " Try again : one—two—three—four, one—two—three—four——" When I understood it more or less he made me sing with him :

Fascisti walk along the street
And click with all the girls they meet.

So we went on dancing. I felt very awkward, for it seemed to me I was doing something contrary to the ideology, and, besides, I felt dizzy and sick with hunger.

Finally Korsuntsev said :

" That's all right. Now brush your clothes and put on the other trousers."

So I did, and we went. On our way I said to him :

" I never thought I would ever dance the foxtrot."

" You probably also never imagined that you would do without food for two days. I suppose you believe that dancing is unworthy of a revolutionary. This isn't the time to bother about such things. The time of military Communism is over. We're living in the N.E.P. age. We've got to learn commerce among other things. So, while we're at it, why not learn dancing, too ? It's good for your soul to enjoy yourself, and there's no reason why we should all lead a monastic life. Besides, it offers exceptional opportunities for getting in closer touch with girls. Dancing simply makes girls—melt ! Only, remember—don't get the wind up, keep your head all the time. If you jump on their toes, it doesn't matter."

" What if I do ? "

" The main thing is not to apologise. Make a joking remark or pretend that it's your partner's fault."

We entered a bourgeois-looking flat, and a young lady came dashing out, and, addressing Korsuntsev as Nicks, dragged him away. I took off my coat and stood in the hall for a while like a fool, and was almost on the point of running away when I noticed that the kitchen door was open ; and when I looked in I saw some cut sausage lying on the table. Without reflecting I walked in, grabbed a few slices of sausage, and crammed them into my mouth. Almost choking, I started chewing it hastily and shoving more bits of sausage into my pockets, when I suddenly heard someone coming. I looked round and saw a fat woman staring at me.

" What do you want, citizen ? " she asked.

" I—I've come with Korsuntsev," I said, hiding the sausage in my cheek, " to dance the foxtrot."

" If it's the foxtrot, you must go to the Pepeliayevs' and not stay here. You ring once for us, but three times for the Pepeliayevs. I must say, some very fishy people come to see them."

" I haven't come to see you, anyway," I said, in an angry tone.

" What are you doing in my kitchen, then ? " she asked. " Most of the crockery here is mine, and not the Pepeliayevs' at all. And I won't stand for any of your foxtrots ! " She suddenly raised her voice and stared at me.

" Some funny people with gumboils " (here she looked at my cheek) " come here and fool about the kitchen, and then go on stamping and yelling all night long—and then I've got to answer for it. I shan't tolerate it, young man. Just you wait and see ! " I was going to tell her to go to hell when Korsuntsev suddenly rushed in.

" Where the devil are you, Kostya ? " he cried, " I was introducing you to the people, and when I looked round you had vanished. Come along ! "

But the lady went on :

" Here are people living without sugar, and yet they spend their nights dancing the foxtrot——"

" Who's got no sugar ? " Korsuntsev asked. " I shall get you some. How many pounds do you want ? "

' Can you really get some ? " she asked.

" As much as you like. It's simply the result of a temporary disorganisation in the food services. But there's plenty of sugar about."

He wrote down in his notebook how much sugar she needed. After that we walked into a big room where a table was laid and where a few couples were dancing to the tune of a queer gramophone without a horn—although there was also a piano in the room.

" Let's have a bite first—it'll give you courage," said Korsuntsev, leading me up to the

table. Here I noticed a young lady in a very short dress.

" Zizi," said Korsuntsev, pointing at me, " you can have the first shot."

We had a few brandies, after which my head began to turn, but they made me feel more at home. So I had a go at the cold fish—which I liked very much. There were bones in it, and I spat them on the floor.

" You certainly eat in a disgusting way," said Zizi, " Can't you put the bones on the plate ? "

" That's all right," I said ; " why bother about such antiquated conventions ? Put the bones on the plate indeed, when I've had no grub for four days ! "

" Your expressions are a bit coarse," said Zizi. " Why can't you say ' food ' instead of ' grub ' ? "

" Well, its essentially the same thing. Do you want to dance ? "

Without saying a word she put her hand on my shoulder. The gramophone went on grinding out the same tune, and at first I got the rhythm all right, only soon my head began to go round and I nearly knocked Zizi off her feet. Although I remembered Korsuntsev's advice and tried to keep cool, I gradually began to feel as awkward as I had felt at first in the hall.

" Come along, dance with me," said another

girl, but I trod on her toe the very first step.

" Oh ! be careful," she cried ; " I've got a corn."

" How can a beautiful lady have corns ? " I said gallantly. " Besides, you should have kept your feet out of my way."

" Oh, should I ! You're a fine one," she said, and went away. I felt bored, and sat down in a far corner (I couldn't very well go up to the supper-table all by myself), and watched how earnestly they were all dancing.

" How idiotic, how perfectly idiotic ! " I thought.

" Why aren't you dancing, Kostya," said a young lady, sitting down beside me. I wondered how she knew my name, but then I guessed that Korsuntsev must have told her.

" Because it's a stupid and anti-revolutionary pastime," I replied. She stared at me in surprise.

" Anti-revolutionary ? How's that ? There's nothing anti-Soviet in it. Lots of Communists dance the foxtrot."

" Well, if they do, they are fake Communists," said I angrily. " This nonsense ought to be stopped."

I must have said it very loudly, for both the dancing and the gramophone suddenly stopped, and all the people crowded round me.

" What's wrong, Kostya ? " said Korsuntsev.

" Have you lost all sense of proportion ? Or have you had too much brandy ? "

" So you believe in Communism ? " said the Zizi girl.

" It's a silly question," said I, getting up. " I'm a student and a Young Communist."

" Very well ! But remember that I believe in God and the foxtrot ! " she cried. " And no one—do you hear ?—no one can stop me. Do you hear, Young Communist ? "

" I can hear fine," I said, and suddenly grew quite sober. " And I also realise that this isn't a place for me. Here, take your sausage back ! "

Here I pulled the bits of sausage out of my pocket and flung them on the table.

" Oh," said Zizi, " he's been stealing sausage ! "

" Oh, that's nothing," said Korsuntsev. " I'll take him away at once. Don't get excited, ladies. It's the brandy and his going without food for a long time——"

I forget how we got into the street. I only remember a few fragments of Korsuntsev's lecture :

" You forgot the real purpose of your visit. The purpose was—food. And, instead of filling yourself up, you started a whole row. I'm surprised you didn't start quoting Marx to them ! People want to enjoy themselves in their own way, and you go there for a feed, and make a

row instead. I admit it's a shameful remnant of the old régime, but, all the same, I can't take you back again—not even for a feed."

"I shan't go, anyway."

"But you must eat, you fool, mustn't you?"

"Listen, Nicks," I suddenly thought of asking him, "how do you persuade those—girls when you want relations with them?"

"Don't be such a fool!" he exclaimed, and, so far as I could see, the brandy had had an effect on him, too. "What a question! Don't you understand that there are a thousand ways of approach. But the main thing to remember is philosophy."

"What has philosophy got to do with it?"

"The philosophic basis. In relation to women you must always remember this formula: 'it doesn't cost me anything, and it gives her pleasure.' That's all. If you stick firmly to this formula, you'll always get what you want. Only here's something I want to ask you perfectly seriously: please don't call me Nicks at the University. Only the Pepeliayevs call me that."

"Do you change your colours there?"

"What do you mean?" he asked with an alarmed look. "No, but I'm known at the University as a speaker and an *active worker*, and it wouldn't at all do to be called by a foxtrot nickname."

" I don't see anything wrong with it," I said. " Lots of fellows are called nicknames."

" Still, please remember what I asked you."

We parted then. I've had a headache all day to-day.

October 21 :

Korsuntsev looked in this morning. " What are you doing to-day ? " he asked.

" In the forenoon I'm going to the Young Correspondents, later to the reading room ; in the evening I have lectures and seminars. That's all."

" What about grub ? "

" There'll be no grub."

" Damn it, man," he said. " Now what *can* I do ? Well, listen, I've got an uncle who's just come from the country—he's a funny chap. Shall we go and have dinner with him ? Only you'll have to drink vodka—it's the only way to get on with him."

" I'm not used to vodka."

" Never mind, you'll soon get into it."

We went to a hotel where we found Korsuntsev's uncle—a very fat man with froggy eyes, who puffed heavily every time he breathed.

" Uncle Peresvet," said Korsuntsev, " I've brought a comrade with me. It'll make dinner more cheerful. Only don't give him too much vodka, or he'll start spouting ideology."

" Well, I'm glad to see him," said Uncle Peresvet. " It was a good idea. But does he drink ? "

" You'll teach him all right."

" By God, so I will ! A good idea ! Come along, boys ! "

We came to a restaurant, where they gave us dinner and a carafe of vodka. Uncle Peresvet really turned out to be a funny man. At each glass he would stroke his belly and say :

" O God ! may this not be the last in my sinful life."

At the third glass he broke into some foreign tongue which sounded like a mixture of French and Russian. After the fourth glass my head began to go round. I said I wouldn't drink any more.

" That won't do at all," said Uncle Peresvet, and made me drink another glass.

After dinner Korsuntsev said :

" Now for some beer and crayfish ! " Uncle Peresvet banged his fist on the table and said : " These are not the words of an infant, they are the words of a man of wisdom. Come on, boys, to a beer-house."

I don't remember how long we stayed there, listening to the singing, or how much beer we drank. I know that at one point I felt sick and fell asleep. At first they tried to waken me, but then they gave it up. When I woke up, a terrible din was going on all round, and drunken

faces, and clouds of tobacco smoke. And Korsuntsev and his uncle were still sitting there, arguing :

" Pushkin is greater."

" Lermontov is deeper."

" Pushkin is purer."

" Lermontov is freer."

" Pushkin is more readable."

" Lermontov——"

But here Korsuntsev fell bang on the ground, so that I got quite a fright.

" So that's that," said Uncle Peresvet. " Let's get a cab."

We hauled Korsuntsev into the street, and Uncle Peresvet began to shout : " *Centaur ! centaur !* "

The cabmen must have understood what he wanted, for several of them came driving along. We put Korsuntsev in the carriage and drove off.

On the way I jumped off and ran home.

October 30 :

I met the shepherd, and we both went to the hostel to see Vera—the girl who had got me a meal with cinema coupons. There are nine people living in the room, which looks poor but is quite clean. There are some pictures on the walls. When we entered, we found Korsuntsev there ; I looked at him rather suspiciously, although I still envy him for his strength.

They were talking about marriage. Vera said : " Well, Kostya, I'm glad you've come, for we're having a kind of party here."

" Let's continue the discussion," said Korsuntsev," Give us your views on lunology."

" But you must explain it to him first," said Vera.

" Lunology," said a girl called Chechotka, " means languishing with love when the moon is shining—and, more generally, love-affairs."

" But marriage, marriage is the main thing," Korsuntsev said impatiently. Here, too, he acted as chairman. " We were discussing the question of registration. Perhaps someone will give us a new idea on the subject."

Here a lad, sitting in the far end of the room, spoke :

" Tell me this. I was walking along the railway line last summer, and I saw a number of peasant women, with red scarves, going past carrying shovels across their shoulders—they must have been working on the line. A goods train went past them, and the engine-driver shouted at them : ' Come on, girls, I'll give you a lift and take you home to your husbands.' ' Never mind our husbands,' they replied, ' there are plenty of men about. What we want is money, not husbands.' The train was going slowly, and the engine-driver shouted : ' You silly geese ! as if you could manage without a husband ! ' ' We'd manage fine without you

fellows,' they cried, ' if only we had money ! ' The engine-driver went on shouting something more, but I couldn't make out the rest ; the women were too far away, too."

" What are you driving at ? " the girls cried. " Your story looks fishy."

" This is what I'm driving at," said the lad ; " the whole problem must be put on a different basis. You must ponder a bit over the words of these women. If women really need money and not husbands—and I've heard several women say so—the question arises as to whether marriage is really necessary at all."

Here the girls kicked up a terrible fuss, and for several minutes I couldn't make anything out. Finally a dark girl, with a little black moustache, said in a bass voice :

" The last speaker has been advocating capitulationism, decadence, and parasitism. His question is unworthy of serious consideration."

" But why ? " said the lad. " The question is perfectly serious if we grant that the important thing is money, not sexual impulse or the feeling of comradeship."

" What you are advocating," said Chechotka, " is debauchery, free love, and piggish nights. Such views are out of place in a University hostel."

" It's *liquidationism* on a universal scale," said the girl with the moustache.

" My proposal to abolish marriage isn't debauchery at all," said the lad earnestly. " It's got nothing to do with registration or non-registration. But suppose a lad or a girl wants to get married. Now they are examined for venereal disease, and only the healthy ones are allowed to get married."

" That's quite beside the point," said the girl with the moustache, squeamishly.

" Well, I believe there ought to be another test : if it is found that a person takes an interest in other people's money, the State ought to forbid him to get married for a year or two. After that, he can get married, but only by special permission."

" Nonsense ! Bunk ! " the girls cried. " Shut up ! That's enough ! "

" Are we having anything for our hot water to-night ? " said Vera. " What are we having for tea ? "

" Damn all ! " said the girl with the moustache. " But, if you like, you can have apricot-jam."

Everybody laughed—for apricot-jam didn't mean jam at all. They brought in the hot water, which they drank without sugar or tea-leaves (same as myself during the past few days). And this is what they call apricot-jam—one of the girls taps her finger on the table and then puts it in her mouth, saying, " Very nice apricot jam " ; the next one does the same

and says, " Very nice strawberry jam "—and so on till they get tired of it.

" What's your idea of marriage, Kostya ? " said Vera.

" I don't think it's a question of either money or registration," I said. " I'd like to know if any of you girls were ever married ? "

" What a silly question to ask. Of course not ! " said the girl with the moustache.

" Then, why do you argue ? Everybody's got to decide the question for himself, say, after a year's married life. Only then could we hold a meeting on the subject and draw some really valuable conclusions."

" And what then ? " said Vera in a strange voice.

" What do you mean ? "

" I mean, if you're not satisfied after a year—are you to divorce ? "

" Of course it would be wrong to keep anyone by force."

" That's right," said Vera. " I see."

But I don't think anyone saw my point.

November 1st :

I went to see Vanka Petukhov, and consulted him about my future. I told him that I would almost certainly be driven out of the house in a few days, that I had no money left, that I had been hauling timber for a

few days, but that the work had come to an end.

"Well, are you losing courage?" said Vanka.

"Not exactly; but it's rather a problem what to do next. I've managed so far—going round borrowing meals, and I've applied for a stipend and for the hostel, but I've no reply so far. Lectures don't do you much good under the circumstances."

"What about social duties?"

"Look here, Vanka," I said warmly. "I realise quite well that I'm not quite up to the scratch, that the social and political work is going ahead everywhere; and that the whole of life is wonderfully interesting; only, tell me, how can one get into it when one has to worry all day where one's going to get a meal. They've already started calling me an 'entertaining fellow,' because others have to entertain me to dinner. Then there's another thing we didn't have at school—when I stand up to speak now, I always feel I'll be sat on; the fellows around just seem to be made for arguing. Not that I'm frightened of them, I even have some ideas in my head which they haven't got. But give me time."

"It's good you aren't losing heart," said Vanka thoughtfully. "But do you know what's wrong with you? The school collectivity to which you belonged has proved too weak to

support you any more. So you've lost all your trumps. And, besides, you're too much of an individualist."

"How do you mean?"

"Don't you remember how at school you always came forward with *your own* projects, without looking at the problems objectively. In a way it's all right, but, on the other hand, you see the result: you've got to start all over again. Are you doing any social work now?"

"I conduct a circle of Young Correspondents for the *Young Generation*."

"That isn't work! You ought to get into a factory. What else do you do?"

"That's all—except borrow money right and left."

"Well, well," said Vanka, "some political worker you are! Listen: can you keep accounts?"

"I don't know. But I could try."

"That's just the trouble, that you don't know, but, all the same, come back in a week. I'll have a talk with some of our fellows."

November 3:

They started pulling down the house yesterday; and I still have no room to stay in. So the shepherd and I had some potato salad and then went out to look for a place.

"Look here, Kostya," he said, "I don't

know what kind of fellow you are. Only I must tell you to cut out all nonsense and bad habits, for we are going to spend the night with prostitutes."

" Surely you've gone crazy ! "

" I'm not crazy at all. I did it several times last year. There are some quite good girls among them—and they'll give you not only shelter, but a meal as well. Only—nothing else ! Do you understand ? "

I don't know how long we wandered about the boulevards. Only it was very late when the shepherd went up to two highly painted girls and said to them :

" Listen, girls ! Can you put us up for the night ? "

" What'll you give us ? "

" We shan't give you anything. We only want a place to sleep in."

" Silly fools ! " said one of them. " The cheek of them ! "

" Why do you talk to tramps ? " said the other. " Come on ! "

After a while we stopped two others.

" Can we stay overnight with you ? " the shepherd said.

" All right, come along ! " they said. " Only treat us first to a bottle of beer."

The shepherd took some small change out of his pocket and gave it to them. They bought two bottles of beer, and we followed them to

their house. Their room was small, and partitioned in two with a dirty sheet. The place smelt of damp and soap. The shepherd took off his warm jacket, put it on the floor, and lay down.

"Why don't you lie down in bed?" said one of the girls.

"Thanks, I'm all right on the floor," said he. "Lie down, Kostya."

"Why, what have you come for?" the other girl asked.

"We've come to sleep," said the shepherd.

"I see!" the first one cried. "And you aren't going to pay us *anything*."

"Get out, you bums!" the other one said. "You can't soak us—off you go."

"Look at the optimists!" the first one cried. "Wanting to get us free of charge!"

"Don't get fussed, Tamara," said the other. "They must be schoolboys. Only you'll excuse us, comrades, but this isn't a free lodging-house."

"All right, all right," said the shepherd, putting on his jacket. "Don't fuss. I thought you were good girls, but——"

"You go without grub for three days, and see how good you'll be!" the girls went on screaming as we walked down the stairs.

Again we wandered about the boulevards, till we came to a fruit stall. The shepherd went behind it, and began to dig up some dead leaves

from under the snow. Although I had no gloves on, I did the same, and in a few minutes we gathered quite a big heap of leaves. " Now lie down with your back against mine," the shepherd ordered, " and cover up your belly with the leaves. We'll soon get warm. And, to fall asleep soon, say a prayer."

" What kind of prayer ? "

" Damn the bed—I'm here instead—damn the bed—I'm here instead."

So I prayed, and I did fall asleep.

November 17 :

This is my sixth night at Korsuntsev's Mozhaïka hostel. There was a vacant berth here. The chief knows, of course, that I'm staying here, but, seeing the berth was vacant in any case, he doesn't protest. Things, on the whole, are much better than I expected at first. So long as you're not too shy, you can always find a bed and a meal. At the same time, I feel depressed, or rather repressed. Everything around me is full of vital energy, and I want to be more of an *activist*, too—only there are so many difficulties in the way.

I attend Soviet law lectures almost exclusively, particularly in the administrative department. The people here are quite different from those on the lit. faculty. The men, and

especially the girls, on the lit. faculty seem to be much more bourgeois than in law—that may be why I find the latter more congenial. To take an example—there are hardly any shingled girls in lit. ; long hair is unhygienic and really undemocratic. So I think I'll change over definitely to law.

November 18 :

There was a meeting at the club of the oral newspaper circle, where they discussed various University subjects. They talked quite well, although they were rather apt to copy the Blue Blouse. I decided to join the circle, and had a talk with one of their activists, called George Stremglavsky. It appears they visit factories, and army detachments, and also intend to visit some villages. Only it seems to me that in that case they ought to discuss subjects that would interest soldiers and peasants, and not merely University students.

George struck me as a bright lad ; all his words and movements are full of a wildly infectious spirit of energy. Among other things, I asked him what faculty he was in.

" I'm on all the faculties," he answered cheerfully, and called after a woman student who had just passed us : " Hullo, Manya ! How are you ? I'll drop in to see you some time, maybe to-night—and will bring you some books

and half a pound of sausage." The girl walked on, nodding at him gaily.

" How can you be on all the faculties all at once ? " I asked.

" It's quite simple. I'm inscribed in law, but I go to any other lectures I have time for. Do you play chess ? " he suddenly asked.

" Not very well."

" Then why don't you join the chess club ? " he asked in surprise. " I've never seen you there yet."

" But I'm no good at it."

" Nonsense, nonsense ! ... Here's a chessplayer coming ! " he cried, pointing to a tall fellow with a fur cap ; and whispered to me : " He was once a stray and a thief, and now he's a student. Isn't it wonderful ? "

" Who wants a game with me ? " the fellow with the fur cap asked, shaking hands with George and me.

" Riabtsov says he can't play," said George, poking me in the ribs, " but it is a lie ! You can see at once he's going to be another Capablanca ! . . . Look, look ! " he cried pointing at another girl who was going past. " There's Clava Groholsky ; I had a great time with her last year, but I chucked her later on, and she's still peeved. See how she blushed when she saw me. She won't talk to me now ! "

I felt amused.

" You're a bit of an oral newspaper yourself,"

I said. " Only I don't see what you're going to do after you've finished if you go to all the faculties."

" I may be the President of the V.Z.I.K. or the Chairman of the Revolutionary Tribunal, or at least a famous poet," he said.

" Why, do you write poetry ? "

" Certainly. You'll find my verses in all the wall-sheets. By the way, you fellows come along to the Marx auditorium at five on Wednesday. There's a professor called Gurievsky giving a lecture on administrative law. Only he's such a driveller that no one can make head or tail of it. So we've decided to have a rag ; the moment he opens his mouth, we'll start a terrible row." Here Stremglavsky disappeared like lightning.

" Shall we have a game ? " said the lad with the fur cap, and we went off to the chess club.

" Were you really a stray before ? " I asked him, while we waited our turn for the chess-board.

" Why, of course," he said, quite cheerfully. " I've travelled about for five years from 1918 to '23."

" Why, do the strays travel ? "

" They do most of the time. That's just the beauty of it. If gives you a feeling of freedom."

" But don't they stop you ? " said I, remembering how the shepherd and I tried to catch the boy in the train.

" That happens sometimes, but usually they let them out again. But it isn't so simple to catch them. They usually travel in boxes."

" What kind of boxes ? "

" There are big boxes under some of the railway carriages. I don't know what they're for. They say they were used for transporting dogs. But they are so big that sometimes three little fellows can get into them. And we used to travel under the engines—so it wasn't so easy to catch us."

" How did you do that ? "

" There's a big pipe at the foot of every engine. I don't know what it's for. But, in any case, you could get in there too ; you always came out as black as a chimney-sweep ; it was great fun ! "

" How did you make a living—beg ? "

" Oh, no ! " he said, with a childish laugh, " it's only the very little ones who beg and sing and juggle with spoons. Most of us used to steal."

" Did you steal, too ? "

" Why, surely—it was the only way."

" Did you ever get caught."

" Of course I did. Only the strays have a motto : ' Steal, but don't get caught.' So one got caught very seldom, except those who played ' open.' "

" What's that ? "

" The ones who pinched something while the

people were watching, and then ran away. But there's a very strong movement among the strays against ' open labour.' A real stray never goes in for it. If he gets caught, it means trouble for the whole gang. For then the police start their raids, and many are sent off to homes for the mentally deficient. Even a few hours at the police station is no fun."

" What do they do then—pick pockets ? "

" Yes, some specialise in that. Others are called *snatchers*. Sometimes we used to do this : In the summer, you know, trains travel with windows open ; so at the station one of us would get on top of the other ; and the moment the train began to move, he would try to get his arm into the open window and to snatch away a suitcase or a handbag. They wouldn't stop the train for that."

" But tell me," I said. " You talk about it so cheerfully now ; but doesn't it give you a painful feeling to think of it ? "

" No, it doesn't. One felt free, and one had a chance to see new places and new people. We had a cave near Tashkent, and six or seven hundred strays lived there. It was quite an organisation in itself, with its own rules and laws. And these laws were strictly obeyed. Only there was no law compelling anyone to live in the cave. If he was tired of it, he could go, and no one could stop him. That was the best of it, and I think of the time with pleasure."

" Don't you wish you were back ? "

" Conditions have changed. The famine is over, the railways are in order, and the trains are watched more carefully. Besides, I'm no longer the same age. It's time I learned something, for I want to be a judge. I feel there's a wrong attitude to law-breakers in our courts. They should be examined psychologically, and an inquiry ought to be made into the conditions which have led him up to his present state, and as to how he could best be given a new start. But let's hurry !—the chessboard is free. Sit down—I'll checkmate you. It's a good game, for it stimulates your mental abilities."

We sat down to play, but, for all his boasting, he didn't checkmate me. We were each left with a king at the end ; so the game was a draw. But he plays with great determination and thinks for a long time over every move. I must play with him again. His name is Senya Pichugin.

November 20 :

We have thick walls at the hostel, but if there's a great noise, you can hear everything. I've been noticing these last few days that there seemed to be a woman screaming next door. At first I took no notice of it, but gradually everybody began to notice it, and the moment

the noise started, everyone would stop to listen.

A married student lives in room No. 251, with his wife and child; there's a notice on the door giving the name of Petrov. I have met this Petrov fellow several times in the passage —he's a dark and solemn-looking specimen with eyeglasses. His wife is very tall and thin, and when she goes down the passage, she always crawls along the wall as though she were afraid to upset something and so be noticed. I have met Petrov a few times at lectures, but never his wife. I asked Korsuntsev several times what the screaming behind the wall meant, but he merely shrugged his shoulders. One night, however, the fellow lying next to me said, "He's beating his wife."

"How do you know?"

"I saw it myself. I once walked along the passage and their door was open. When I looked in I saw her crouching in a corner and him rushing at her and hitting her in the face. But she wasn't saying anything."

"How do we hear her screaming, then?"

"I suppose she does yell when the door is shut."

"I'm surprised at one thing," I said. "How is it you didn't interfere when you saw him beating her?"

"He shut the door at once, and I hadn't time to do anything. Or I would certainly have interfered."

" If I were you I would have opened the door and asked him to stop that nonsense."

" Well, you know, it doesn't do to meddle with other people's affairs here."

" But suppose he were murdering her, what then ? "

" Well, murder is a different thing."

" It isn't different. The things he's doing are just as bad."

Here the conversation stopped, but I firmly decided not to leave it at that. When Korsuntsev and the others arrived, I said to them all :

" Look here, comrades. We've got a student next door who beats and almost murders his wife. What the reasons are, I don't know. Perhaps you know, but won't mention them."

" Listen, Kostya," said Korsuntsev, " First of all, I don't understand this official tone in talking to comrades, and, secondly, you are getting too excited. Can't you discuss the matter calmly ? "

" All right, I'll talk calmly. But you must understand that this matter must be dealt with at once."

" We would have dealt with it long ago," said Korsuntsev, " if it hadn't been for the rules of the hostel. Only we are supposed not to interfere with the life of others, and we can't enter another man's room without his express permission. This creates equilibrium and general peace. Suppose that anyone objected to your

getting up at 6 o'clock, and came into our room to protest. Surely, you would tell such a fellow to go to hell."

"Well, I don't know about your peace and equilibrium when a man goes on beating a tall, thin woman night after night. As for me, I'll go in and give Petrov a good hiding next time the row begins."

"In that case, I must remind you," said Korsuntsev, "that you are only a visitor here and are staying here illegally, so to speak. Therefore any piece of violent self-assertion on your part will merely end in your being kicked out. This is neither a secondary school nor your private home, where you could behave any way you liked."

"Is this a piece of psychological defence?" I asked sarcastically.

"Call it whatever you like. I prefer to call it self-preservation."

Suddenly a little Carelian boy cried: "Riabtsov and I are going to punch Petrov in the nose!"

"You'll be a fool if you do," said Korsuntsev impatiently. "But tell me, Riabtsov, why are you such a hedgehog? I don't know why I should bother with you at all. When I wanted to give you a meal, you kicked up a silly row; and when I was going to give you a bed, you objected also. It's really too stupid."

"Riabtsov!" the little Carelian shouted,

who had evidently been visualising our fight with Petrov, " you hit him from the right, and I'll hit him from the left. He won't be able to run away then. Ho, ho ! "

" Well," said Korsuntsev in conclusion, " remember this, that I shall be neither on your side nor on Petrov's."

" On whose, then, will you be ? " I asked ironically.

" On the side of the hostel rules," he replied.

November 23 :

As I had borrowed from everybody I knew, and as I still had to eat, I decided to look for Sylva, though I wasn't really anxious to appeal to Sylva, who is associated in my mind with so many memories. I was told she was in the anatomy department, and I went there to look for her. I had never been there before, and I was amazed at the strong, disgusting smell which I smelt as soon as I reached the cloak-room. Girls in white overalls were going back and forward, and I asked one of them where I could find Sylphida Dubinin. She told me Sylva was busy working on a corpse, and I had to go right into the anatomy-room. I put my fingers to my nose, but took them away the next moment, for I suddenly felt an unusually disgusting sweet taste in my mouth.

There were tattered corpses lying on every

table, and the professor and students—mostly girls—in white overalls, were crowding round them. Further along a solitary girl was sitting comfortably on a chair, closely examining a corpse, and looking things up in a book at the same time. At another table some girls were cutting up a corpse's back. Because I wasn't used to it, I suppose, it all made me feel quite sick, especially with that smell. But, after the first impression had passed, I was struck by the earnest and matter-of-fact way in which they approached the subject. As I watched, it seemed as though the anatomy-room was a busy ant-heap, and I felt ashamed of hanging about doing nothing.

" I wonder where I'll find her," I thought, when suddenly she came running along, clutching a knife.

" Hullo, Vladlen," she said, " are you changing over to medicine ? "

" No, I've simply got to talk to you."

" All right, let's go to the cloak-room and talk. Only the air here is better than there. But wait a minute. I've got a lovely corpse here, light and not too fat ; would you like to look at it ? "

" No, some other time," I said, for I felt quite sick (maybe because I was hungry). " And, besides, how can a corpse be lovely ? "

" There are different corpses," she said. " If you get a decomposed one, it's very difficult,

for the tissues are all mixed up. But to-day I've got a nice fresh one."

"Doesn't it disgust you?" I asked.

"Sometimes it does," she said; "especially if you bend over too much; but, then, it's science, and it's the business of science to examine everything."

"When the professor took us in here for the first time, he said: 'Imagine that you are going, not into a room full of corpses, but into a flowering garden full of sweet-scented roses and magnolias. Biologically, corpses and flowers are the same thing—atoms of the same matter.' We imagined it, and it was all right. I'm sure the smell at the chemical lab. is much worse than here. And, apart from the smell, you really do come to the threshold of knowledge of the human body, as the professor said. On the whole, I have got used to it, and I'm sure you would get used to it, too; the only bad point is that the girls get into the habit of smoking. I have, however, trained myself to get used to the smell without a cigarette. Not bad, eh?"

"Of course, it's fine. You're a great girl, Sylva," I said. We had got to the cloak-room by this time, and I had stopped feeling so sick. It must have been not only the smell, but the novel sight of so many corpses that made me feel like that.

"I want to ask you something, Sylva," I said.

"What is it?" she said absent-mindedly.

" But, listen, don't you want to see our museum? We've already passed the myology and osteology section. Let me initiate you."

Without waiting for my reply, she dragged me into the museum. There were lots of glass cases in the place, full of all kinds of bones.

" Look at this," said Sylva excitedly ; " this is the *os temporale*—the temple bone. It's simply a dreadfully difficult one. They've been joking that people who commit suicide always shoot through this bone and destroy it on purpose, because it's such a difficult one. This here is the pelvis—looks like a saddle, doesn't it ? And look at this ! Do you know that this bit of bone here regulates the growth of the body ? It depends on this bit whether your arms hang down to the ground or whether your nose is three feet long. Then, there are some other difficult bones——"

" Wait a moment, Sylva," I said ; " this'll do for the present."

" Why, don't you want to have a look at the muscles and nerves ? " she went on enthusiastically, without listening. " Come on, let's go into that other room. Look at the facial nerves on this head ; they are terribly confusing. And look at these muscles—they look like cooked ham, that's why they are called——"

" Oh, stop it for a bit," said I, " this'll do just now. I've even lost my appetite, and I don't

think I need the money any longer. You know, I've come here to borrow forty copecks from you."

"You certainly have the most wobbly nerves," said Sylva; "it'll all go away when you get out into the open air. When you go out, get some snow and rub your teeth with it. And I'm going to give you a whole rouble. In case of anything, you can always come here; and even if I am out, you can always get some money from our girls."

As I walked across the yard, I kept spitting all the time, for I had a disgusting sweetish taste in my mouth. But, in the end, my hunger proved stronger, and I went to the refectory.

November 25:

Since I have been to the anatomy amphitheatre, I have started looking at the literature and law faculties with different eyes. I dropped in to-day at one of the literature seminars, and shall try to note down my impression for the sake of comparison with the anatomy-room. The austere, learned-looking, white walls, with their vast windows, used at first to impress me a great deal, and I concentrated on every word the professor uttered. Now it has lost its novelty, and I am able to pay attention to some minor details.

The lecturess was discussing the poet Esenin.

She seemed to have something wrong with her voice, for those who weren't right in front couldn't hear a word. They kept shouting "Speak up! speak up!" but it made no difference. The students were dressed in different kinds of clothes. There was one wearing a black shirt and a large white collar. These are the kind known as *knuts*. Another sat there in a padded sheepskin coat, but didn't seem to feel too hot, while the one next to him unbuttoned even his shirt with the heat. The girls all tried to compete in smartness. In the middle of the lecture a dark-skinned fellow rushed into the room; he was wearing spectacles and had a nose like a beak. He apologised, sat down, tried on his neighbour's chequered cap, smiled, patted the girl next to him on the shoulder, pulled out a notebook, blew his nose—and all this almost simultaneously! At the same time he also managed to sign the register. After that there was a great scene of jealousy. There was a dark girl with a very short skirt sitting next to the beak-nosed fellow, with only the passage between them. The fellow, however, with his spectacles sparkling, kept stroking the girl next to him—a blonde-looking beast—who kept giggling all the time. At last the dark one could stand it no longer and went over to the fellow's bench, and, leaning on his shoulder, began to whisper something to him. This annoyed the blonde one, and she stuck her nose

in a book. Then she quietly stretched out her arm and got hold of the fellow's cap and slipped it under her notebook. All this was very amusing to watch, and I didn't listen to the lecture at all.

November 26 :

We got a " living newspaper" together in three days, and went to the barracks yesterday. I didn't think it would be a success, but in the end it turned out all right. We were all in a great mood, and George Stremglavsky put up a particularly good show. While we were still in the tramcar George kept jumping off and on, at every turning, and tried to dash through to the other platform, where, he cried, he had caught sight of a girl friend of his.

" You seem to be friends with the whole town," said one of the girls peevishly.

" You're jealous, Lena, aren't you ? " he said. We all laughed, and Lena, turning as red as a flag, said :

" It would be useless to be jealous about you —you've got too many friends at the University alone. You can be sure that nobody can take you seriously ; you are far too flighty and inconstant."

" Me inconstant ! " he yelled, so that everyone in the car could hear him. " And you've got the nerve to tell me that ! I've been crazy

about you these past three months, and you haven't even noticed it."

"How can you have been crazy about her for three months?" said another girl student, who was sitting there as though she were playing the piano. "Last week you told *me* you couldn't live without me." Here we all laughed, and not only the "living newspaper" folks, but all the people in the tramcar as well. But George didn't seem to mind.

"Yes, my dears!" he exclaimed, "I love you all, upon my word I do! How can I help it if I like so many girls!"

"You're a liar," said one of our "newspaper" people, the mandolinist Kalygin, in a deep bass voice. "I know, all right, who you are *really* interested in. . . . I know."

"Who is it? Who is it?" George pounced on him.

"The first-year medical, Dubinin," said the mandolinist calmly, and George Stremglavsky suddenly grew embarrassed. But his embarrassment didn't last long. As for me, it struck me like lightning—what if it was Sylva? Of course, it might be somebody with the same name, but for some reason or other I was quite certain that it was Sylva, though I didn't dare to ask.

"You are wrong," George explained. "She's got red ears; she must have got them frozen. Tell me, seriously, comrades," he exclaimed,

addressing the people in the car, " do you think it's possible to fall in love with a girl whose ears are red ? "

" But listen, George," said Lena, " would you like me to introduce you to one with blue ears ? Though her ears are blue, she is wonderful at reciting Esenin's poetry."

" No, thanks, don't bother," said George.

" Well, let's get off, comrades," he said suddenly ; and we all got out of the car.

While the " living paper " was being performed, and was getting on well, I got hold of Stremglavsky when he was alone and asked him : " Tell me, what's Dubinin's name."

" How do you mean ? " he asked, breathing heavily. He was just then busy changing from Chamberlain to a raree showman. " Why are you interested, anyway ? "

" I just am ; tell me."

" You certainly do choose the wrong time for discussing these things," he said peevishly, sticking the grey beard savagely on to his chin. " Well, Dunya is her name—that's all. Do you know her, by any chance ? "

" So it is Sylva then," said I indifferently. " She was a schoolmate of mine, and I know her very well. Is it true that you and she—hm—— ? "

" Nonsense, nonsense ! " he said, but I could see that he was embarrassed. " Well, why don't you dress up ? It'll soon be your turn to sing

your funny verses." I didn't enjoy doing the verses at all ; my heart felt heavy. But, on the whole, the Red soldiers received us in a very friendly way.

November 29 :

To-day I watched for Sylva outside the anatomy department for about fifteen minutes ; for I didn't want to go inside. It was getting dark, and a fine snow was falling, and a couple were walking up and down in front of the building ; when they turned round the corner I noticed how they kissed.

" What a place to choose," I thought peevishly. At that moment Sylva came out. I said good evening to her and asked her point-blank : " Tell me, Sylva, do you know a fellow called George Stremglavsky ? "

" Of course I do," she replied ; " everybody knows him. He's very amusing and gets on well in everything."

" Yes, he's studying at all the faculties at the same time," said I gloomily. " What good will he be in the end ? "

" He's a perfect scream," said Sylva. " Do you know, he comes to the anatomy-room also —not merely that, but to work. One of the professors tried to throw him out, but he won't stop coming."

" Tell me, does he walk out with you ? "

" 'Walk out' is such a vulgar word," said she indignantly. " When did you start using it ? "

" That's quite all right," said I angrily ; " don't you try to change the subject. You know quite well what I mean ; but you will keep cottoning on to words."

" I don't understand this tone of yours," said Sylva. She seemed to prick up her ears, and I could feel a kind of demarcation line growing up between us. " Who has given you a right to talk like this to me ? Do I belong to you, or what ? You forget yourself, my dear Vladlen."

" You are trying to get out of it again," said I. " Why won't you simply answer my question —yes or no. Does Stremglavksy matter to you, or not ? "

" I won't answer any such questions," said she proudly.

" I see, so he *does* matter to you. I'll remember that."

" But why should this worry you, anyway," Sylva asked. " I think you've got a damned cheek. I'm sure there's something wrong with you. Well, has anything been settled about your hostel ? "

" Damn all's been settled," said I gloomily, and went away. I wanted to tell her so many things, and ask her advice, but, if she talks to me like this, we can't have anything more in common. But, by the way, Stremglavsky is a liar about her ears being frozen. I looked to-day,

on purpose. She's got little pink ears, and not red ones at all, as he said. He must have said it on purpose to mislead us.

Sylva must be peeved with me, but I really can't do anything about it. If she must walk out with Stremglavsky, she just must—that's all about it.

I must go and look for Vera to-morrow.

THE STORY OF VERA

November 30 :

Vera is a mixture of cheek and naïveté, and I sometimes feel as though she were a little girl from the secondary school. The other day an aunt of hers came from the Ukraine and brought her a lot of food. Vera arranged a feast, and invited me and a friend of hers, Nyurka Koshkin, to come to it. In the middle of the feast I noticed a map of China hanging on the wall.

" Do you know anything about the Chinese events ? " I asked.

" Why, of course I do," said Vera.

" We both know a lot about it. We got into quite a mess on account of China."

" Tell me—what was it ? "

" Don't tell him ! " Nyurka cried.

" Why not ? " said Vera. " It's all over now, and there's no harm in it. This is how it happened. At one time Nyurka and I got into the

habit of going to a bourgeois cinema ; the manager was a friend of ours—well, not exactly a friend—at any rate, we made his acquaintance there."

" But that's not the point," said Nyurka, interrupting her. " You'd better tell him how the two of us went to China."

" Wait a minute ; I'll tell him the whole story in the proper order. I must tell you, Kostya, that we were really a pair of silly fools a year ago, and were fond of all kinds of adventures."

" Have you stopped being silly fools ? "

" Now we are learned women. Well, anyway, I was telling you about the manager——"

" Do you see, Kostya," Nyurka put in, " he had such a huge, huge nose——"

" Oh, never mind his nose," said Vera. " If you keep on chipping in I shan't finish till the morning. I must tell you that before that happened we had applied to the M.O.P.R., and had asked them to send us to help Fin-Yui-Syan. They made fun of us at the M.O.P.R., but we didn't give in until we were firmly told that we must first finish our studies at the University. This annoyed us terribly, and we even chucked working for a time and started frequenting that cinema place. . . . Each time we went there, we were shown into a box. So we sat there like grand ladies, feeding on chocolate——"

" Where did you get the chocolate ? " I asked.

" Shall I tell him ? " said Vera.

" All right, tell him, seeing you're telling him the whole story," Nyurka replied.

" We used to find it there. Each time we sat down in the box we would find some chocolate laid out there. Without thinking, we just had a go at it. One night we were sitting there, eating chocolate, and watching the picture, when somebody came into the box and sat down behind us. ' Who's that ? ' Nyurka asked. To which he replied : ' You girls mustn't be frightened ; I shan't eat you. I'm a very kind man. My mummy always tells me I'm very kind.' ' What mummy ? ' I asked. ' My own mummy, Glikeria Fedulyevna.' Here we both laughed, and he said : ' And all my friends agree that I'm a very good boy.' When the light was turned on, we saw that the ' boy ' was a terribly fat man, at least thirty stone, and taking up two whole chairs. We thought this even funnier, and when the light went out we didn't watch the picture any more, but only giggled. Of course, we at once realised that the individual had some fishy intentions. But, seeing we were so disappointed at not being allowed to go to China, we were prepared to try any adventure. Especially as the fat one was really very amusing—although, I must say, he was a bit of a Two-step."

" A *Two-step*—what's that ? "

" Well, you see, Nyurka and I were still feeling the effects of the secondary school—all this love of adventure and all that sort of thing. We called first-class men Henry. A Henry had to be handsome, well dressed, and well brought-up. The second class was neither one thing nor another—these were the Two-steps. A Two-step doesn't need to be specially well dressed, and it doesn't even matter whether he parts his hair, but he must know how to talk and mustn't continually use swear-words. Well, the third type are the Saps. It doesn't even matter if a Sap is well dressed, for you know at once that he's a Sap."

" It is hard to believe," said I, " that you are Soviet students, and not young bourgeois ladies."

" Yes, but that was last year, during our first year at the University, and don't you be so insulting, or I'll stop telling you my story. Well, anyway, the fat one was a Two-step. When the picture was over, he said to us : ' Do you want me to show you how I can drive a car ? ' ' Of course we do,' we answered. And I was really anxious to see him get into a car—what if it collapsed under him ? So we went out into the square, and he got inside a car with one of those yellow streaks along its side. ' Well, get in, girls,' he said. Nyurka was going to get in, but I pulled her back. Then Two-step said :

' You come along again to-morrow ; I'll show you some amusing tricks.' Then he drove away. When Nyurka and I came back here, I started scolding her for wanting to get into the car."

" That's a lie," said Nyurka. " You made a row, not because of the car, but because I had holes in my gloves."

" Well, never mind—it may have been the gloves. In any case, we had a long squabble as to whether a motor-car corresponded to the ideology or not. We were both dying to have a drive, for we had never been in a car before. ' What can he do to us, anyway ? ' Nyurka said. ' I'm not afraid of him, and next time he asks us, I'll go.' So we didn't decide the question one way or another. A day or two after, we went back to the cinema, and were shown to the box. Two-step was already sitting there on his two chairs. And there was also another ginger-haired fellow in the box as well, who could hardly speak any Russian. We asked the fat one who it was, and he replied : ' This is my interpreter.' At first the ' interpreter ' struck us as being a kind of servant, for he kept running to the buffet all the time getting chocolates and *cidro* for us. Nyurka and I gulped down three bottles of *cidro*. The ' interpreter ' then got us some more *cidro*, but we couldn't drink any more, and so the bottles remained standing there. Then we again went out into the square,

and Two-step said : ' Well, are you going for a drive to-day ? ' Well, I suddenly took my courage in both hands and jumped into the car, and Nyurka got in after me. The car dashed off—ooh ! at a terrible rate. We drove about for a long time and got quite frozen. Then Two-step said : ' Now let's go and get warm.' And we stopped at a restaurant."

" You certainly are a couple of bloody fools," said I. " How didn't you see at once that your Two-step was a nepman and his ' interpreter ' some spy or foreign agent. I don't understand it : all the people who enter the University become serious-minded, but you behaved like silly little girls."

" It's because we weren't allowed to go to China—we were terribly annoyed. At the Grand they gave us some hot wine to warm us up. I began to drink it, when I noticed that the ' interpreter ' was whispering something to the waiter. ' If he goes on whispering,' I said, ' we shall go away at once.' Then Two-step put on a mysterious look and said : ' You mustn't be annoyed with him. During the years of the Revolution he has lost twenty-seven sons, daughters, nephews, and aunts, not to mention some small children, and he's kept looking for them ever since. He has even gone a little dotty over it.' Here the ' interpreter ' cast up his eyes, and the tears streamed down his cheeks. ' Well, are you still not able to get over it, old

man?' said Two-step. 'I can't,' said the 'interpreter,' with tears running down his face. 'Each time I think of it, it gives me a tummy-ache.'"

"It was a put-up show," said I.

"Of course it was," said Vera, "only it was all very funny. 'Well, if you are so upset,' said Two-step, 'you had better have something for your nerves. I say, comrade of the Innkeepers' Trade Union,' said he, addressing the waiter, 'get us some valerian drops—something for our harassed nerves!' Here the waiter brought in a whole row of bottles, and I got very cheerful and stopped caring about anything."

"You simply got drunk," said Nyurka.

"How could I get drunk?"

"Well, with the hot wine. I noticed at once that you had lost your head."

"Perhaps you noticed it; I didn't, though. . . . Anyway, I didn't want to drink any more, and I jumped up and pulled Nyurka after me. But at that moment the 'interpreter' suddenly went white and fell back on his chair, and began to gasp for air. 'You see what you've done to him,' said Two-step. 'I forgot to tell you that the sight of you always reminds him of the daughters he has lost. Especially you,' said he, pointing at me, 'remind him of one of them. What was her name again? Agrafena?' 'Bakutriana,' the 'interpreter' gasped, with his

eyeballs rolling about. I got a fright, and decided to stay on a bit till he recovered. He pulled himself together and said: 'I had seven daughters—heavenly beautiful, every one of them. And they were all the same age.' 'What were their names?' asked Nyurka, who also had begun to feel sorry for him. 'Their names were—Bakutriana, the most beautiful one, then Cordelia, Regan, Goneril, and Nasturtia. And the two youngest ones—my darling little girls—my babies—my little baby daughters Sheherazade and Sopega . . .'"

"Well, you've certainly got a good memory," said I.

"I remember everything, as if it had been on a screen. 'Well,' said Two-step, 'Sheherazade loved to play croquet, Cordelia played billiards, Regan rode on horseback. And Bakutriana liked to have a drink. You remind me of her so vividly. Let's drink something to calm our nerves.' So we drank some sweet wine, and the fat one said to his 'interpreter': 'Now, old chap, you'll have to tell us about Aunt Columbaria. He lost her as well, in the Revolution.' 'Oh, yes, poor Aunt Columbaria! Such a wonderful woman. There hasn't been such an aunt since the creation of the world. Just imagine it; she used to get a hundred and twenty—two academic food rations!' Here the 'interpreter' began to simper again. 'And she gave me half these rations—me, her favourite

nephew.' ' And what did you give her in return ? ' said Two-step in a stern tone of voice. ' I used to take her peppermints,' said the ' interpreter.' ' The poor old thing couldn't live without peppermints. In those days it was hard to get even saccharine, to say nothing of peppermints. But I always managed to get her some.' ' Where did you get them ? ' said Two-step even more severely. ' I used to pinch them at the chemist's,' said the ' interpreter,' casting down his eyes. ' So you've been robbing the State then, eh ? ' said Two-step. ' But then I heated the chemist's shop with my own timber,' the 'interpreter' exclaimed. 'But tell me, why was Aunt Columbaria so fond of peppermints ? ' said Two-step. ' It is strange, isn't it ? ' ' There's nothing strange about it,' said the ' interpreter,' sobbing, ' the poor old thing was mad on drink. " My mouth," she would say, " is as dry as the Niagara desert." Let's have some champagne to drink to her memory.' ' That's an idea,' said Two-step, ' only I wonder why you think she's dead. I estimate that she must still be alive.' This was the kind of cross-talk with which they made me and Nyurka drink more and more, until we were quite drunk in the end, and everything around seemed to be enveloped in a mist. It was in this condition that they took us away somewhere. The next morning I woke up here, on this very couch, and there was a brooch pinned on to my blouse. All the girls insisted on

knowing where the brooch had come from, but I didn't know myself. This would have been the end of it, if the girls hadn't told me and Nyurka that, when we returned to the hostel at night, we had kicked up the devil of a row in the passage. And when one of the secretaries arrived on the scene we were said to have yelled : ' We aren't often like this, and that's why we are behaving just as we please.' Nyurka and I were so ashamed that we ran away from the hostel and decided never to go back. So we wandered about the streets all day, not knowing what to do with ourselves. In the end we went to the University, and there we met the trade union secretary (who was living at our hostel), and she said to us : ' Where did you girls get so tight last night ? You're a fine pair ! ' Nyurka and I nearly died with shame and went straight out into the street. So we strolled about till the evening, and then went back to the cinema. Two-step and the ' interpreter ' were already there, busy talking to the manager, and when they saw us come in they all burst out laughing. ' Do you want us to take you to China ? ' said Two-step. We must have told them something the night before about wanting to go to China. At first we said no, but in the end we agreed. And, indeed, they took us off to the station. The ' interpreter ' went to buy the tickets, and Nyurka and I went to the women's cloakroom. As we were going there, we

suddenly met an engine-driver, whom Nyurka knew."

" My father is an engine-driver, that's why I know so many of them," said Nyurka.

"Well," Vera went on, "'Where are you going, Nyurka?' said the engine-driver. 'To China,' said Nyurka; 'we are both going to China.' 'Have you been given a job there?' he asked. 'No,' said Nyurka. 'Well, how can you go, then?' 'We've run away from our hostel,' said Nyurka. 'I say, wait a moment,' said the engine-driver, 'this sounds fishy to me. You girls come along with me.' And he took us to the machine-room, which was full of men looking as black and dirty as devils. 'Here,' he said, 'these two birds are wanting to run off to China. Come on, tell us all about it.' We only said that we didn't want to go back to our hostel, and didn't say anything about the rest. 'Well, I don't think this'll do,' said the engine-driver. 'I shan't let you go anywhere, and shall just take you back to the hostel at once.' To which we replied that we would refuse to go back to any hostel. 'In that case,' said he, 'I'll have to talk to you in a different language. I say, Maslov, you keep an eye on them.' He went out, and came back in five minutes with a fellow carrying a revolver and with green stripes on his sleeves. 'Look here,' he said to him, 'I shall hand them over to you as a member of the G.P.U.[1]

[1] Formerly Che-ka.

But, as you aren't on duty at the station, will you please promptly deliver these two birds to their hostel against receipt from the secretary. In case they try to run away, just fire at them.' We nearly died with fright at this, and my arms and legs got all numb. But Nyurka said quite bravely : 'We are Soviet law students and are both getting a stipend, and you have no right to shoot us.' Here they all laughed ; and the G.P.U. man said : 'Well, all right, I shan't shoot you, but you girls must do as I tell you, just as if I were an army commander or Comrade Budenny. Quick march !' When we got to the hostel, the secretary called for the committee. So the committee asked us : 'Don't you want to live in our hostel ?' We both said no. All the same, we were put back into this very room. And the story got all over the place, and Nyurka and I were all the more determined to run away."

"But why ?" I asked.

"Well, everybody made fun of us, and they even composed a song about us :

Two Soviet studentesses
Went off to China land,
Instead of which they only spent
An evening at the Grand.

I laughed.

"Yes, you think it funny, too, don't you ?"

said Vera. " But it was no joke for us. So we ran away."

" Where did you go ? "

" We took a room at an old woman's place in the ' Dirty Suburb.' "

" What made you go there ? "

" At first we stopped going to the University, but in the end we had to go, to get our stipend. There the girls from the hostel caught hold of us, and in the end managed to find out where we were staying. The next morning a whole deputation came to our house and started picking us to bits, telling us that we had no sense of social discipline, that we were unworthy of the name of students, and that we ought to drop our petty-bourgeois habits. This annoyed us even more, but in the end a fellow managed to persuade us. He said that there was no harm in this temporary deterioration, but that it was no good our going on on the same lines. 'You surely realise yourselves,' he said, ' that you've been in the wrong, and you are punishing yourselves for it. It's a good thing that you should have this critical attitude to your own actions. But this is no reason for you to behave like a street pedlar in front of a policeman. Everyone would have forgotten all about your exploits if you hadn't behaved like this.' ' How are we behaving ? ' I asked. ' Well, you've run away. And, of course, everybody is wondering why you've done it, and you've made yourselves an

unnecessary subject of conversation. If you had been sensible, you would have stayed on at the hostel, and no one would have thought any more about it.' His logic was good, and so Nyurka and I went back to the hostel that day."

"And was that the end of it?"

"It was. Only the committee warned us that if it happened again we would be thrown out of the hostel and would lose our stipend as well."

"Quite right, too," said I. "Lots of people haven't a place to spend the night in, and yet a couple of bloody fools like you dare to behave like that. I would have chucked you out for good, without any further question."

"You wouldn't say that," said Vera, "if you knew something of how we lived at the old woman's place. The old woman pestered the life out of us, wanting to introduce us to 'some very respectable moneyed gentlemen,' and we knew quite well what a slippery path we were on. Nyurka and I used to come to the hostel at night and stand in the passage, weeping. One night we wept the whole time till next morning. We were such fools, and had almost decided to become prostitutes on principle. Not until we came back to the hostel did we begin to see things in the right light. And when the people made fun of us, we began to laugh also. Well, that was the end of it."

December 1 :

A most unpleasant business : I'm afraid I won't be able to stay at the Mozhaika hostel again. This is how it happened :

This evening, when everyone had returned from their lectures, we suddenly heard the same agonised crying coming from behind the wall. So I got up and said to the Carelian :

" Come on, Vaima."

" I say, boys," said Korsuntsev, " I'll give you a tip : keep out of it."

But Vaima seized a mop, and we went off. I went out into the passage and knocked at Petrov's door. Everything suddenly became quiet within, and then a male voice said : " Who's that ? "

" Neighbours," said I. " What do you want ? " came the voice ; and I could hear Petrov come close to the door.

" What's all that screaming in your room ? " I asked. " Anything to do with you ? You mind your own business." " Yes, it is my business," said I, " and, if the row doesn't stop at once, I'll get the police." " Who the hell are you, anyway ? " said Petrov, and suddenly threw the door wide open. " This is something new —a dirty little bounder breaking into my room and trying to order me about ! "

" Punch him, punch him, Riabtsov ! " Vaima cried, and thrust his mop forward like a spear.

" Look here, Comrade Petrov—you chuck it, or I'm going to give you a hot time."

" We shall see," said he, " who's going to get the hot time. I am going to the secretary now to find out who you are. I don't seem to have seen you at the hostel before."

Here he dashed into the passage, but Vaima tried to stop him with his mop. Petrov didn't notice it in the dark, tripped over it and crashed down on the floor.

" Oh, damn ! " he roared, fumbling about on the floor, " and you've broken my glasses. That's all right—that's all right——"

He ran down the passage. Here I noticed that a crowd of fellows had rushed out of their rooms and were looking on. And Petrov's wife, who had been hiding all the time, now came out of her room and said in a weeping voice :

" Why do you come and poke your nose in where nobody's asked you ? "

" You're a responsible Soviet student, comrade," said I, " and you must guard your civil rights and not allow your husband to kick you about the room."

" Oh, go to hell, the lot of you ! " cried Petrov's wife, and slammed the door at my face.

" Well, do you see ? " said Korsunstev sarcastically. " She'll deny everything, and it'll be you who'll be the fool in the end."

At that moment the secretary came rushing down the passage, with Petrov shuffling along like a blind man and yelling : " These two have assaulted me in my own room ! "

I had to go to the office and explain. There I was told to leave the hostel first thing tomorrow morning. And Petrov also threatened to go to court. Although Korsuntsev isn't asleep, he has turned his face to the wall and won't talk to me. Well, to hell with him. I'm disappointed in the fellow.

December 3 :

I am writing this in a new place—in the hostel where Vanka Petukhov is living. There isn't a free bed in the place, so I have to sleep on the floor. I naturally told Vanka the whole Mozhaïka story, and he said : " The fact that you got yourself mixed up in that rotten business doesn't matter. What does matter is that you still haven't managed to find a firm basis for yourself—and your social balance suffers from it. You had better get into a hostel as soon as possible ; for all I know they may put you out of this place, too."

There's a fellow whose bed is next to Vanka's. Vanka calls him the Bull, and always swears at him. Bull is a student at the Economic Institute, but I believe he is more concerned about his

muscles than about economics. I have never seen him yet with a book, but every morning he shows off his biceps to all the fellows.

"I could throw every one of you over the roof-tops," he says.

"What would be the good of that?" says Vanka.

"Nothing—just that."

Then he always talks about some "Prince Umballo"; he must have read something about the prince or seen him on the pictures. Whatever he's talking about, he always manages to bring in the prince. Some of the fellows call him Prince Umballo.

On the other side of Vanka's bed there's another fellow, who took part in the guerilla war. He wears a cavalry coat, and when he comes home he folds it up neatly and hangs it up on the wall. He's a very silent fellow; you can't squeeze a word out of him, and he seems to look down on us with a certain air of contempt. Why should he be so cocky? If I had had to go to the Civil War, I would have gone as cheerfully as he; it's just my misfortune that I didn't get the chance. Only once I heard this fellow utter a very characteristic sentence. Vanka, he, and I were going along the street, and we passed large numbers of fat bourgeois men and women, all dressed up.

"A machine-gun would do well here."

Vanka looked sternly at him, and said:

" This is dialectic reasoning. Machine-guns are of no use in everyday life."

Partisan[1] shut up at once. The curious thing about him is that he is nearly thirty—much older than Vanka and me ; and yet he always listens carefully to everything that Vanka says to him. At the factory I had already noticed that he could make even quite old people obey him. Bull seems to be the only one at the hostel who takes absolutely no notice of him.

Apart from his work at the institute, Vanka is at present busy reading the first volume of Marx's *Capital*. I read a few pages in the middle: very interesting, but hard to follow.

December 5 :

I haven't been a week yet at Vanka's hostel, but I have already had the chance of observing a very curious affair. Bull usually comes home very late at night, and the others make fun of him : " Well, Bull, what kind of cow have you been out with to-night—a black one or a red one ? " Bull swears obscenely in reply, but the others won't stop, and usually begin to discuss in rather crude terms the girl with whom he is supposed to have been out. It is rather a joke.

But during the past few days Vanka and the Partisan have been whispering to one another, and, after everyone had gone to bed

[1] Partisan in Russian means a guerilla soldier.

to-night, Vanka stayed up and waited for Bull's return. When Bull came back, Vanka said to him : " I say, Bull, don't you think you've been rather overdoing it with the women ? "

" Any of your business ? " Bull mumbled. " Does it matter to you how many women I've got? Are you a criminal police inspector, or what ? "

" I say, boys," said Vanka, " don't you think this *does* concern the criminal police ? Or perhaps we can handle the matter ourselves ? What do you say ? "

One of the fellows said that one lad was chucked out of another hostel for trying to rape the charwoman.

" Well, there you are," said Vanka, " so it isn't merely a matter for the criminal police, after all."

" Don't you be a Prince Umballo," said Bull, growing crimson. " I'll give you one in the nozzle that'll teach you how to meddle with other people's affairs."

" Don't you worry, brother ; your biceps won't frighten me," said Vanka. " In any case, boys, there are certain little sins of his which we ought to discuss. Do you mind ? "

Bull suddenly jumped up from his bed, put on his trousers, and rushed into the passage.

" See what a fright he got ! " Vanka laughed. " Well, boys, let's sleep now ; and let's get hold of him on a Sunday, when he can't run away."

When I went into the passage, later on, Bull came up to me and said : " You seem to be a good fellow, so you can tell your pal that, if he dares to start a trial, I'll tear his head off. I'm not afraid of his revolver—you can tell him that. Some Prince Umballo—dirty little snotnose ! "

" I'll give you a tip," said I. " You had better leave him alone. I have known him for years ; he'll kill you without wincing."

" Well, it remains to be seen who will do the killing," said Bull. " You can tell him that."

He snatched a poker out of the corner and bent it like a twig.

" See that ? " he said.

" Yes, I see, but what about it ? "

" Well, you can tell him that I'll bend him in two the same as this."

After that I asked Vanka :

" What exactly has he done that you should want to try him ? "

" He spoils the women students. There was such a nice girl—a student at the workers' faculty. And that damned swine has given her a baby and won't even look at her. She is left alone, helpless, and with a baby. She can't claim any compensation from him, for all he has is his State stipend, and nothing can be deducted from that. But this disgraceful business ought to be put an end to, somehow or other. Especially as it's a sport to him ; during

his first year at the institute he's already lived with three women."

"But doesn't he go in for athletics?" I asked. "I thought athletics diverted one's sexual energy into other directions."

"So did I," said Vanka, "but it doesn't seem to work that way with some people."

December 10:

Bull had a visitor to-day. This person sat at first with his back turned to me, and I didn't recognise him. He and Bull went on arguing like this for a long time. Later on Vanka came along with a girl. When Bull saw her, he said to his pal:

"Well, let's go."

"No, wait a minute," said Vanka, "there's something I want to talk to you about."

"Well, I don't want to talk to you," said Bull, shaking his head.

"I know you don't; but you'll have to," said Vanka, barring his way. "You had better sit down—you'll be more comfortable."

Here Bull's pal turned round, and I recognised Korsuntsev. He pretended not to know me.

"You go to hell!" Bull shouted and tried to push his way to the door. But in vain: Partisan got in front of the door.

"Sit down," he said, "or it'll turn out worse for you in the end."

" Who's this Prince Umballo ? " said Bull, turning to the others in the room. " Only the police are allowed to behave like this. What do you want from me ? "

" We don't want much," said Vanka. " Sit down and listen."

But suddenly the girl who had come with Vanka jumped up and whispered : " No, I can't, I can't. Let me go."

No one tried to stop her, and she went.

" Well, listen to this," said Vanka to the Bull. " Our whole gang charges you with not treating your wives in a comrade-like spirit. I shan't quote any instances—for you know the facts yourself ; but you must answer our questions. Tell us, do you consider your conduct normal and in agreement with the duties of a proletarian student ? "

Then Korsuntsev said very politely : " Although I am an outsider here, I must interfere with this. Tell me, comrade, is it a regular habit here to interfere with other people's affairs ? I consider this as bad as putting your hand in another's pocket."

" Who is this ? " said Vanka to the Bull. " Is this your counsel ? Can't you do the talking yourself ? "

" No, let him talk first," said the Bull, " I shall speak afterwards."

" Very well," said Vanka. " Let the counsel for the defence speak."

" This is certainly a nice way of treating a fellow-student," said Korsuntsev. " Making fun of him doesn't prove anything yet. I should like to remind this Marxian comrade," said he, pointing at Vanka, " of a certain passage in the works of Friedrich Engels—that's to say, if the comrade has read him. In his *Principles of Communism* Engels says perfectly clearly that sexual relations concern only the two persons involved, and that society has nothing whatsoever to do with it. In my opinion Engels is perfectly right : and this is the point of view of all sound Marxian morality. Every interference of this kind shows a hundred-per-cent. petty-bourgeois mentality. Gregory, of course," said he, pointing at Bull, " is to blame, because he isn't paying any compensation for the child. But you just think of it : where can he possibly find the money ? You know he's an orphan——"

" Ha, ha ! " said Vanka.

" Another case of unfair mockery," said Korsuntsev, " but you won't put me off, my dear comrades. Well, the case is clear : he is unable to pay compensation—and that's the end of it. The Communist moral code states quite clearly that this matter concerns only two people."

" Have you finished ? "

" Yes, for the present."

" You say it concerns only two people ? "

" Yes, only two."

" But suppose the matter concerns not two,

but five people, what then?" said Vanka, with his hands on his sides.

"What five people?" the Bull roared.

"Can't you count on your fingers?" said Vanka, bending over his fingers. "One—that's yourself; I am glad to give you first place; two is Sonya, who has just been here; three—is Sonya's child; and you've forgotten about Alexeyeva and Klyugina, have you? There's five for you—exactly!"

Korsuntsev grew embarrassed, but not for long, for he said: "In any case, I don't understand the point of this interference. If the Soviet laws have been broken, you can go to court. But this kind of interference merely creates friction among comrades, and creates a strained atmosphere in the hostel."

"Look here, my lad," said Vanka, "don't you see that you've been hitting at yourself all the time? You say you are against interference with other people's affairs."

"Positively."

"Well, why then do you interfere? You've come from heaven knows where, have chipped into an argument that is no business of yours, have assumed the rôle of an advocate—do you call this non-interference?"

"You get out of here quick!" said Partisan, taking Korsuntsev by the shoulder. "We'll manage without you, don't worry."

Korsuntsev meant to answer, but, looking

around, he must have realised that everybody was against him ; so he seized his hat and coat and walked quickly out of the room.

" Well, we've got rid of one, anyway," said Vanka, laughing. " Now we'll manage you all right."

Bull cast down his eyes, turned red, and made a vague gesture with his arms.

" You can't get out of it now," said Vanka. " Your tongue isn't in the right place. What do you say, comrades," he continued, addressing the others, " to a proposal of this kind. This fellow must give us his word of honour that, firstly, so long as he lives at this hostel, he will refrain from any further amorous adventures ; and, secondly, that he will pay five roubles a month out of his stipend to his wife with the child. That's all he can afford. On these conditions alone will he be allowed to stay on at the hostel. If he doesn't agree—out he goes. Do you agree, comrades ? "

They all agreed.

" I'll have to give my word, I suppose," said the Bull gloomily ; then he put on his coat and went out.

" He only disgraces the name of a Soviet student," said Vanka. " That's what I call a petty-bourgeois spirit."

" Why petty-bourgeois ? " I asked.

" What else would you call it ? When there is quantity instead of quality, it's petty-bourgeois.

It's a stop in a man's internal growth. His biceps grow, but his mental horizon remains the same."

December 15 :

When one lives, as I do now, without a room, without even a regular abode, and when the only thought haunting one since morning is the question of where one can borrow money for a meal—one simply can't think of anything worth while. And yet there are so many interesting things happening all around, that I should really look at them more closely.

I make more and more acquaintances, and something strange happens to every one of them—things that one never even reads of in books. But as the question of *principles* is the main question so far as I am concerned, not all these happenings are of interest to me. They talk and argue a lot, these days, about romanticism. Romanticism is a state when—mainly in literature—a man breaks away from the earth, completely forgets all that is going on all round him, and everything begins to look sublime and heroic to him. Some say that there is also a special kind of romance in everyday life, but I don't understand that. I suppose it means that one's got to find some beauty and heroism in even the ordinary things, and that it's not merely a case of thinking about heroic subjects.

But the atmosphere around me has nothing beautiful or heroic in it ; on the contrary, it is rather dull and depressing. What beauty is there in sleeping on a bench in the street ? Or sticking in the reading-room from morning till night, cramming and memorising, till you're quite stiff and dumb at the end of it—there isn't much beauty in that, is there ? Or in the lectures—although some of them are quite interesting ? At the seminars most of the men and girls just mumble. They talk a lot nowadays about a famous poet who always gets drunk and kicks up rows. I have read his poems. I don't like them. He writes of practically nothing except himself, as though nothing in the world existed except him. Why shouldn't he, for instance, write about the Volkhovstroi?[1] He's got a lot of money, which he squanders ; he would do better to take a trip to Volkhovstroi and find inspiration there for a really good poem. I have reasoned this out logically : for I'm sure that at Volkhovstroi one can really find some of that " everyday romance."

Or, again, take Zoya Travnikova, whom we called Black Zoya at school, and whom I met in the street the other day. She told me that she was unable to get a job anywhere and had absolutely nothing to do. When she was at school, she was interested in the dead, but now she's stopped thinking even of that ; life's been

[1] The famous water-power scheme.

pretty hard on her. She has got very thin rushing about town looking for work. She even gave me some poems, and, though they are quite worthless, they express her real feelings. Here's one of them :

It is the end. We've reached the fatal goal.
Where is the sense, the purpose of it all ?
At school we thought our future was a treasure ;
But now I'm sad and weary beyond measure.
These lines may have an odour of decay—
" You're a degenerate," maybe you'll say ;
Perhaps I have failed in life, and am indeed
The only one who never will succeed.
And yet I know that there are others, too,
Who don't know how to live, or what to do.
And our sad hearts are filled with blackest terror,
And life is nothing but a painful error.

December 16 :

There's something queer going on with the Partisan. I always had the idea that he was a silent, earnest, and busy man. But last night he came in pretty drunk, and made a speech that I couldn't really make head or tail of. It amounted, roughly, to this : "You all imagine that you are very fine, hundred-per-cent. fellows and all that sort of thing. You are nothing of the kind. You're a lot of dirty swine. And, by the way, I'm the biggest swine among you. If you knew certain things about me, you would say the same. But how can you know ?

Do you know who you are? You are nothing but two-legged tummies—that's a new physiological insect that I've discovered——"

At this point Vanka tried to stop him, but in vain. The Partisan was determined to make a speech, and, as he's a pretty strong fellow, there was no way of keeping him back. So we decided to endure it to the bitter end.

"There are some miserable wretches in the world," he shouted, "and I am the most miserable wretch among them. But—beware! I know you all, and you can't get away from me! If the bourgeois deserve a machine-gun, you fellows deserve to be put in a cage. One of you said to me at the refectory to-day: 'I'm a biologist.' I know quite well what biology is. But he was no biologist, but a bi-damned fool, that is, a double-damned fool. And so are all the rest of you."

Here one of the fellows got up and said: "You had better shut up, or we'll tie your hands behind your back and take you off to the secretary." But Vanka gave me a surprise. He suddenly called the fellow aside and told him to leave Partisan alone and to let him yell as much as he liked. It was very surprising to see Vanka do that. Had he got the wind up, or what?

And the Partisan went on:

"No, it isn't enough to say that I'm a swine and a miserable wretch. I am a criminal—yes,

a criminal. A criminal towards my own conscience. I've been shot through the head, and I've two bayonet wounds, and shell-shock—yes, but that's no business of yours, my dear swine. I mean this has nothing at all to do with the World R-r-revolution. Give me some water ! Water, I tell you !—or I'll——"

He pulled out his Colt, and they naturally gave him water at once. He put the Colt away, and, looking at us fixedly, said softly : " But what if—she—goes mad ? What'll happen then ? Will it be the end of the world ? "

When we at last managed to calm him down and he went to bed, I asked Vanka :

" Do you think some woman's mixed up in this ? "

Vanka shrugged his shoulders :

" I've no idea," he said. " This must be something in the nature of a fit. The wound in his head hasn't properly healed yet."

" Shouldn't we take the revolver away ? "

" No, leave it. He'll be all right after he's had a sleep. Don't touch him now ; you might waken him."

Just then Partisan suddenly turned his face towards me, and I nearly gave a yell.

His eyes were open and he was staring straight at me. I waited : nothing happened. Some people manage to sleep with their eyes open.

December 17 :

It's hard to say whether I'm feeling happy or sad after my last talk with Sylva. She wanted to know where and how I was living, so that I had to take her into the hostel. All the others happened to be out at the time.

" Well," said she, looking around, " this is no worse than the place I'm living in. At least it's clean here. I sometimes go to see some fellows—the place they live in is such a pigsty that I am simply amazed how students, cultured people, can live in such dirt."

" Who are the fellows you go to see ? " I asked. " George Stremglavsky, by any chance ? "

" Can't you leave me alone about George ? " she said angrily. " I have noticed you hanging about the passages with some woman—but I don't say anything about it."

" What can you say ? That was Vera."

" Vera or Sonya—what do I care ? Then I've seen you talk to Stremglavsky several times. What were you talking about ? "

" Ah ! so, after all, you *are* interested in everything about Stremglavsky ! " said I. " We didn't talk about anything in particular. But it annoys and hurts me to think that he seems to be at home with everybody, while I am a stranger wherever I go. I can't push in anywhere, I can't cling on to anything. This is the explanation

I've found : the University does not consist, like the school, of a mass of fellows and girls with common interests, but of a large number of small, separate groups centring round some particular interest—mainly their own subject. But sometimes it's chess, or athletics, or boozing, or the theatre. Personally, I have no specific interest of any kind. I am interested in everything, in life as a whole. That's what I said to George Stremglavsky."

" And what did he say ? "

" He said that he also was interested in everything, but that he had a way of taking up some special thing for a time and forgetting about the rest, and that was why he had more roots in the University than I had."

" I've come to think," said Sylva, " that the secondary school is to blame for a lot of things. The school has given scarcely any of us a definite aim in life. It would have been better to have gone to a technical college or to some more specialised kind of school. We would feel on more solid ground."

" What about you ? "

" I am different. Ever since I was a child it has been my ambition to look after the sick. I once nearly killed my mother with my cures. And only the other day Stremglavsky had earache, and I cured him of it in no time."

" Stremglavsky again ! Tell me, are you trying to make a fool of me ? "

" I'm not trying to do anything of the kind. But it's become quite impossible to talk to you."

So we quarrelled, and she went away.

December 20 :

More about the Partisan. I'm getting more and more interested in the fellow. He's not the kind of fellow one can go up and talk to, and so one has to write about him only in so far as he reveals himself to the world at large. I was particularly interested to know who he had been talking about (evidently a girl) the night he was drunk and called us a lot of swine. I don't believe it can be entirely due to the wound in his head, and I feel there's something terrible behind it, quite apart from his wound. I have to think it over all by myself, for Vanka is either busy at his institute or reading Marx, and of course it's useless trying to approach Partisan himself. It's curious—I have only once seen his eyes—that night he suddenly turned his face to me. When he's awake, he never looks at anyone, and always keeps looking aside—perhaps into himself—and hardly ever speaks.

But yesterday for the first time he let me peep into him—just as though he'd raised the corner of a stage curtain. It happened at the literary evening at the Hostel Club. Some of the fellows read their poems, and it was rather dull and

stupid. They read some poems, and then everybody praised them. One of the fellows read out a story about a count and how this count became a Communist and in the end turned out to be an *agent-provocateur*.

When this story was over, Partisan suddenly stood up and, pushing his way through the audience, said : " I also want to read you something."

I got interested at once.

" These are my experiences," said he—" my experiences at the front. Happened to me personally. I know it is very poor stuff, but it doesn't matter. All your stuff is poor."

" Oh, get on with it ! Never mind your preface ! " the others shouted. Then Partisan started. It was a poem of the Civil War—the attempt of a small detachment to break through the enemy lines on a cold wintry night. In the end he finds himself all alone in the middle of a field, without his commander, without his comrades, but he won't abandon his hope of breaking through the lines, and he goes on, with beating heart, his head bent low like a bull, carrying his charged rifle, ready to attack.

Not till Partisan stopped reading did I look at him. He stood there, with his clenched fists at his sides and his head bent down. There was a dead silence—one could feel that everybody had been deeply impressed. Then someone

shouted " Hurrah ! " and the rest began to applaud. I clapped for all I was worth ; and some girl shouted : " He's a real poet, comrades ! And we didn't even know."

The enthusiasm ran wild, and they were going to carry him shoulder-high and throw him up in the air, but he had already disappeared.

When I returned to the room, I found him lying on his bed with his face buried in his pillow. I was terribly anxious to talk to him about poetry and literature, but I realised that it was no good going near him. Poets seem to be morbid or abnormal people—they are certainly quite different from the rest.

December 22 :

The holidays have begun, and everyone in our room at the hostel has gone out of town except Vanka, Bull, Partisan, and myself. Everything around looks so empty, and after being used to a crowd all the time, one feels terribly dull and lonely. When I came back from the reading-room to-day I found Bull alone in the room. He gave me a strange, sly look and said : " Well, Prince Umballo is in for it this time."

I knew that anyone might be Prince Umballo to him, so I asked him whom he meant.

" You know whom I mean—your glorious partisan warrior."

I got worried and asked what had happened.

" Nothing's happened," he said, " but he seems to be having a craze for the womenfolk, too."

" That's all bunk," said I. I knew that by contradicting him one could always get the real truth out of him.

" You say it's bunk ? All right, you shall see."

" Of course it's bunk," said I. " You've got it in the neck yourself, and now you're trying to make out that the others are no better than you."

Here Bull jumped up from the bed, and, pushing his enormous fist right in front of my nose, he said : " Seen this before ? "

" Well, I've seen it ? What of it ? This doesn't prove anything about Partisan."

" Ha ! ha ! so you still think I don't know. I know fine who's been here to-day. But you don't."

" Of course I know. The secretary was here to collect the money."

" Not a secretary at all—but a female."

" To get that fiver off you, I suppose ? "

" Wrong again. She wasn't after my fiver at all—it was Partisan she wanted."

" But it's easy enough to find him at the institute. Why should she come in here ? "

" She's not working at the institute. She

barged in here, and went all round the place, staring at all the beds. I said : ' What do you want ? ' And she said : ' I'm not looking for you.' Then I questioned her and made out that she was looking for Partisan. Although she doesn't know his name, she described him all right."

" But what can he be to her if she doesn't even know his name ? "

" That's her own look-out. I started playing about with her, and she knocked me one in the face and dashed off."

Here Bull laughed like a fool and lay down on the bed and stuck his legs up in the air. When Vanka returned, I told him all about it, but he thought that it was no good interfering, as it was probably someone Partisan had met in the war and who was now trying to find him. Later on, when Partisan came in, Bull told him all about it. Partisan sat down on his bed, and, resting his face on his hands, stayed like that for half an hour. Then he borrowed a rouble from Vanka and went out.

This is very queer ; it doesn't seem a bit like a war acquaintance.

UNCLE PERESVET

December 23 :

I again fell in with Korsuntsev and his uncle. This is how it happened. Although I have been

a bit suspicious of Korsuntsev for the past few weeks, I don't think he has really done anything anti-proletarian, for which he ought to be tried. So when he asked me to dinner yesterday, I saw nothing wrong in it, and went. Of course, Korsuntsev is ideologically somewhat inconsistent, and, strictly speaking, his views are tainted with a petty-bourgeois spirit, but, after all, one has to study this spirit before starting a fight against it. I realise quite well that this path is a dangerous one, and, if one is not careful enough, it can lead one to opportunism, passivity, and even Menshevism. To resist this, one has to watch one's self very carefully all the time, and then it's all right. Besides, I can always go and ask Vanka Petukhov's advice. (Although, curiously enough, Vanka occasionally gets stuck at certain questions—but I'll come to this later.)

As I discovered yesterday, one can learn quite a lot even from people like Korsuntsev and his uncle ; only one has all the time to apply to them the knife of ideological analysis.

We naturally began with vodka. Uncle Peresvet was in his room at the hotel drinking vodka when Korsuntsev and I walked in. After dinner he offered to take us to the circus.

There were several different turns at the circus. What I particularly disliked was the two clowns—one all covered with flour, and the other in a tail-coat—who kept joking on

political subjects. There was nothing funny in what they said, and one could feel how they had to squeeze the jokes out of themselves. But I was terribly thrilled with the gymnastics and the acrobatic stunts high up in the cupola, which I watched with bated breath. And I was specially delighted with a jolly fellow (not the white clown) who joked all the time and sang and played all kinds of instruments. I wished I could do all that myself—and for a very simple reason. The point is that at parties, as well as in life generally, one can never think of the right thing to say, or the right joke, and one only remembers afterwards what one should have said. And, while the others stand out in some way or other—some with singing, others with their witticisms, others again with the strength of their muscles—I always have to sit silently in the corner, envying them all. Korsuntsev seemed to guess my thoughts, and, poking me in the side, said : " He's a smart lad, eh ? Don't you wish you could do it ? " The fellow seemed to come out from among the audience, and, when he got into the ring, he stumbled over a carpet and said : " How can one work here with all these carpets around ? "

There was really nothing funny in it, and still I laughed with the others till my belly ached.

Then they brought along some knives and

forks, and the fellow started playing a whole symphony with them ; then he suddenly stopped and began to juggle with the knives and forks. After that he took a plate and flung it across the ring and ran after it, and when he caught it he said : " The old thing didn't wiggle long, eh ? "

" He's pinched that from you, uncle," said Korsuntsev.

" I shan't let him off so easily," said Uncle Peresvet. " I'll give him a rough time."

" But what if it's the other way round ? " said Korsuntsev. " What if you've pinched it from him and not he from you ? That seems much more likely : you must have heard him before."

" Well, what about it ? " said Uncle Peresvet ; " there's no harm in that. A joke is like a funny story—it's common property."

I quite agree with him, for if one had to think out one's own jokes (except on the stage), not more than one man in a thousand would be allowed to talk. But that circus fellow is one of those who make up jokes which everybody else can use afterwards. Jokes alone can make conversation really lively. Of course, this doesn't mean that one can't make up one's own jokes as well. After he had played a military march on two bottles and said : " There now—and that's the end," I didn't even accuse Korsuntsev for having pinched the saying. After

that the fellow began to weep, and the circus attendant said to him : " What's wrong with you ? "

" Well, you see," said the circus man, " my wife has been arrested."

" Well, that's nothing," said the attendant ; " if she's been arrested, they'll let her out soon enough."

" That's just what's making me cry," said the man, and the whole audience roared. If you think it over carefully, you soon realise that there was really nothing funny in that—damn silly, in fact—and yet in ordinary conversation it ought to go down well ; I must remember it, and see how it'll work. Besides, the juggler pretends all the time to be very clumsy—as though everything were in his way, but he's really very slick ; and this contrast has a very humorous effect. I must try that, too : study gymnastics at first and then jump on people's toes and poke my elbows into them and pretend the next moment as though nothing had happened. One can achieve quite a considerable success in that way ; and it's much easier than thinking everything out for one's self. As I am writing this I feel that all this must sound very childish, but unless one learns things from everyday experience one is bound to stay in the shade. Take George Stremglavsky, for instance ; it would be interesting to find out how he manages to be so successful in life. I

don't say he's learned it all watching clowns and acrobats ; but surely he can't have thought it all out for himself? He can dance the *chechotka*, and impersonate everybody, and whistle all kinds of tunes, and I'm sure no girl could ever be bored with him.

One might reply that it shows a petty-bourgeois spirit to borrow other people's jokes ; but in reality the increase in one's habits and jokes really denotes mental growth and not mental stagnation. I might also be told that at seventeen and a half one ought to be more serious and concentrate more on one's work. Well, I am serious-minded. But, after all, lectures aren't everything ; one has to consider parties, and excursions, and talks with different people ; and this is just where you've got to be at your best, or people won't talk to you.

After the circus we went on to a restaurant, and there we had an interesting talk.

" I fail to understand you people," said Uncle Peresvet ; " there is no joy about you, no beauty. This wasn't how students used to live in my days. To begin with, every fellow had his flame —a woman student or some other young lady. That was for the soul, for the heart, so to speak. And for the body they had a shop-girl or a dressmaker, or else they frequented cheerful little houses. It was a full-blooded life ; youth was youth in those days. Compare that with your life ! keeping your nose to the grindstone all

the time. Even if one of you tries to show his youthful spirit, he is taken to court or all the papers start shouting about him."

" That's all right, old man," said Korsuntsev, tapping him on the shoulder ; " you don't see any further than your nose. On the whole, the young people *are* quieter now, but remember that our motto is : ' Aim at a crow, and you'll hit an eagle.' At any rate, so far as the female supply is concerned, there's more than necessary. Of course, it's only a temporary state—and it's full of drawbacks. This damned baby compensation business that they've invented is really a nuisance. So far as I'm concerned, I'm going to get well married as soon as I'm through the University. I'll have a cosy, quiet little home, a flat with at least three rooms, and some decent furniture—and I'll live to my heart's content."

" Whom are you going to marry ? " I asked.

" That's just where the difficulty comes in. I know lots of nice girls, but not one of them is worth marrying."

" You ought to try out the old method," said Uncle Peresvet ; " get all your girl friends together and put on a coat with a dangling button ; then marry the one who'll be the first to sew it on."

" Yes, indeed ! " Korsuntsev laughed, " some of them have never held a needle in their hand, and others won't do it on principle."

"What principle?" said Uncle Peresvet. "Is it your *politgrammar*?"

"No, simply equality. Your system is no damn good, uncle. Besides, I don't need a wife merely for sewing on my buttons. My demands are more ambitious. She's got to know how to dance the foxtrot and how to discuss literature and the drama. Besides, she must be attractive enough to be able to attract a circle round her. I'm a man with a social sense, and my wife must also have a social quality."

"How about running the house? Will that be just a minor thing?" said Uncle Peresvet.

"Why a minor thing? Not at all! That will be for the servants, while my wife and I will be chiefly taken up with intellectual matters."

"I suppose the foxtrot is an intellectual matter," said I, very poisonously. "I don't think you are very consistent, Korsuntsev. Don't you remember how only the other day you held forth about the true social basis of the University student? Remember how you thundered against the petty-bourgeois spirit and the growth of anti-social ideology. Don't you think that nice little flats, and servants, and foxtrots are anti-social?"

"You're a silly nut," said Korsuntsev contemptuously, tossing off a glass of wine and spitting smartly into the corner of the room. "You've got to learn where to say such things.

You always blurt out the wrong things at the wrong time, like an idiot. Who the devil asked you to expound your ideology at the Pepeliayevs' that time? It reminds one of the fool who started howling a funeral dirge at a wedding and began to dance about at a funeral. You've got to learn how to live. Just think of it: how could you possibly do without speechifying in the true ideological spirit at some of our meetings? It's an easy enough trick. Only real life runs along a different path, and doesn't care a damn for all your ideology."

"Yes," said Uncle Peresvet, "we also had an ideology in our young days. Only it was a cheerful ideology: '*Gaudeamus igitur*.' Do you know what that means: 'Let us therefore be joyful.' That's what it means. And it's a good enough programme for any life. Enjoy yourself—and that's all about it."

"That's too damn simple," said Korsuntsev. "In this present age a man has to be much shrewder and cleverer and more many-sided. That's the kind of wife I'm going to look for."

"I should like to know where you hope to find her," said I.

"I don't think I'll find the right one in the U.S.S.R. There aren't any like that here. I'll have to go to America. In fact, I've been specially studying English."

"Where'll you get the cash?" said I.

"And why America? Why not France or

Germany?" Uncle Peresvet inquired. Korsuntsev ignored my question, but replied to his uncle: "Because there's a marriage institute in America which makes it possible to find the ideal wife in the most matter-of-fact way."

"What kind of institute is that? That must be fun," said Uncle Peresvet, growing interested and ordering more claret, as the first seven bottles were now empty.

"It's a wonderful achievement," said Korsuntsev. It will take our fatheads a long time before they think of anything quite so brilliant. Any citizen—man or woman—wanting to get married applies to the institute, giving a full description of him- or herself: colour and length of hair, height, colour of eyes and face, age, state of health, etc. Besides, the applicant must also state the peculiarities of his intellectual make-up: the things he's interested in, the circle of acquaintances, etc. After that he states his yearly income, whether or not he gambles on the stock-exchange, whether he drinks alcoholic liquor, whether he has been married before—in short, everything that would give a full characterisation of his person. The application, of course, is accompanied by a full-size photograph, and he also fills in a form describing in detail the kind of person he wants to marry. This also includes a detailed description of all the desired physical, mental, and financial qualities."

" Getting a wife like that is like buying a pair of trousers in a shop of ready-made clothes, isn't it ? " said I.

" Wait a moment, Kostya ; don't interrupt him," said Uncle Peresvet, " he's spinning a damn good yarn."

" It isn't a yarn at all," said Korsuntsev very earnestly. " This institute is in the state of Ohio —you can ask about it if you like. And you can be as sarcastic as you like, Riabtsov ; it won't alter my conviction that this form of marriage is still the most perfect one. It isn't for nothing that they call it the Eugenic Institute—that is, one based on the idea of improving the human race. Two or three weeks after the application has been sent in, the applicant is invited to the institute. There he is given a room and full board and is shown a number of photographs to select from. If he finds among them a woman who appeals to him, he lets the directors know. Then, at a certain fixed hour he is taken into a dark room and seated on a pedestal. After a while he is lit up very brightly for about five seconds. Then the light goes out and is put on again a few minutes later at the other end of the room. There he sees the woman whose photograph he has chosen. This is how the introduction takes place between two people who wish to get married. If neither party has any further objections, the institute makes arrangements for a closer acquaintance. For this purpose the

institute has special parks and gardens, ponds and frogs and nightingales—in short, everything that a couple of sweethearts could wish for. At the same time either of them can refuse to go on with it after the first meeting. Supposing that the man objects to gold teeth—which the photograph doesn't show—he can then draw back. He stays at the institute until he finds a suitable wife. Then the marriage contract is signed, and, for those who want a religious ceremony, there are priests of every denomination specially maintained by the institute."

" Damn good ! " cried Uncle Peresvet. " By God, I'm going to America to-morrow. But, in the meantime, let's have some vodka. I hate this sour muck ; only makes your brains damp."

" As for me, I think the whole idea's damnable," said I. For some unknown reason I imagined Sylva going to America to choose a man, and all the men scrutinising and examining her from every standpoint.

" Why is it damnable ? " said Korsuntsev. " More of your ideology, I suppose ? I suppose it is better to marry anyone and anyhow—just as it's done in this country ? And then suffer all your life, or—what's worse—pay your baby compensation to three or four strange women ? "

" It'll be you who'll have to pay the compensation, not I," I replied. " But in my opinion

there is something insulting to a human being about your American institute."

"Where's the insult?" said Korsuntsev. "A person can only be insulted against his will. But there everything is done in accordance with your own desires, tastes, and habits."

"No—there's something mechanical about it. To treat a person mechanically is—I repeat it—like buying ready-made trousers, or like putting a machine together. There—I've got it. The insult consists in the fact that you don't do it all yourself, but that there's somebody else, some other persons, mixed up in it. I really don't see how an independent fellow like you can be prepared to allow other people to settle such a vital question for you. It would be like leading you along the street by the hand, in case you fell under a bus. Love is a purely private matter, and it's against human nature to run it on business lines—like your institute."

"No!" Uncle Peresvet cried in a drunken voice, banging the table with his fist. "No! I'm going home to-morrow, and shall send the old woman to hell and go off to America. The old thing didn't wiggle long! Won't they understand me? To hell! I'll speak to them in French: *Ne pas longtemps la vieille femme wiggle.* . . . See? But, I say, what if I don't like it after I've got married, eh?"

"You'll have to stick it," said Korsuntsev, smiling. "If you're married you're married:

divorces are very expensive over there, and the Americans don't approve of divorced people."

"Well, what can I do, then?" Uncle Peresvet wondered. "Hurrah! I've got it. If I want a divorce, I'll come back to the U.S.S.R., and go straight to the registry office. One rouble forty!"

BOOK III

BOOK III

December 26 :

They have all gone home for their holidays, and I am all alone in the room now. Up to the last moment Partisan was saying that he wouldn't go away anywhere. But suddenly he got out his hamper, packed up, and departed. It's a curious thing—I am sure I saw him in the street yesterday. If he hasn't gone out of town, why should he have left the hostel ? He is a queer fellow. Before leaving, Bull was so pleased that he walked on his hands right round the room, and even talked to Vanka in quite a friendly way. Vanka tried to persuade me to go with him to see the factories, and Vaima, the Carelian, wanted me to go home with him. " Come along to Carelia," he would say, " we'll catch a lot of trout there." It appears they catch trout from under the ice or from the waterfalls. I was dying to go, but I haven't a bean in the world. If I had known sooner, I might have wangled a free ticket, but it was too late. So I've stayed on, all by myself.

I have drifted away from the masses. This is quite clear to me—for I have no intimate friends, and any of the social work I do is done in a bureaucratic spirit. At school I was the

child and product of my environment, but what am I now ? I haven't had time yet to enter into the collective life of the University. All this crowd of twelve thousand people seems to have fallen on top of me and squashed me. I haven't been absorbed by it, and don't fully belong to it yet. There is a certain amount of individualism in this, and I'll have to watch it carefully. I believe that for this reason even Sylva has come to be a bit of a stranger ; for she is a very clear representative of the *collective* body, and she is being driven along by this body—there's no doubt about it. However much I try to analyse it, the result is always the same : Sylva is completely absorbed in her work, and nothing matters to her except her mortuary ; everything else, including people, is in the background. Hence my conclusion that she moves and develops on collective lines—although not everybody works as well and as conscientiously as she does.

It's quite clear that I'll have to start working seriously—and the rest will come. I'll start straight off with the new year—1926. I'll take Soviet law.

I've thought out an explanation for my quarrel with Sylva : I am more interested in people and life in general than in work. This is partly due to my problem of where to live, and partly to my family circumstances, but in the main, I admit, it's been my own fault.

December 28 :

Now, I never suspected that he had a mother. I was terribly excited when I found out. Nikpetozh told me about it. I met him in the street, and he told me she was looking for me. As I had nothing else to do, I decided to go and see her.

I found her, a woman of medium height, in a hall filled with trunks and hampers ; when I told her who I was, she seized my arm with both hands and dragged me into a little room. She sat down facing me—and I was surprised to see how red her cheeks were, but I soon realised that the redness wasn't natural, for there were two red streaks, smudged with tears, I suppose. She said : " Well, tell me. When did you see—Vitenka for the last time ? "

I told her. I meant to tell her about the letter, and the poems as well, but stopped myself in time, for I remembered that these were not to be given to anybody except his brother. It was just as well, for she said : " I am being told that —that it was an accident. I should like to know whether that's true."

" Who told you ? " said I, trying to gain time for reflection.

" The head of the police. He said that no note was left, as these—suicides usually do, and the police report says that it was an accident. Vitenka made that terrible gun, and must have wanted to try it out."

She began to cry. I pondered over the foolish position I was in, and at the same time watched the tears running along the red streaks on her cheeks. Then she jumped up and said :

" Don't answer me just yet. Oh, but I quite forgot. May I offer you something—such a good friend of Vitya's. I have some bread and butter." She produced a slice of bread and a little piece of melted butter on a saucer. Although I felt hungry, I naturally didn't eat. I felt very uncomfortable, as though I had dropped into a different world.

" Don't answer my question yet," she repeated. " I am going to show you something. Read it first and then tell me what you make of it."

She took a packet tied with a black ribbon out of the table-drawer, untied it slowly, and then took out a crumbled sheet, which she handed to me. It was one of those decadent poems of the degenerate aristocracy, written in Victor Shahovskoy's handwriting. Then she took it gently back, and, folding it in the same way, she tied the bundle up with its black ribbon and put it back in the drawer.

" Now you—can answer me. Do these verses make it clear that Vitenka—did it himself ? "

" What does it matter ? " I suddenly blurted out. But a second later I felt sorry for having said it. She stared at me with her pale, almost

white eyes, and, coming very close to me, whispered :

" What does it matter ? Forgive me, but I don't understand what you mean : ' What does it matter ? ' Answer me honestly, quite honestly—a mother's heart is asking you."

Here it suddenly seemed to me that I wasn't talking to a person at all, but to some strange insane being, who was trying to hypnotise me : it was all so different from our everyday life and surroundings. A swarm of thoughts rushed through my head.

" I wonder what those curtains are made of ? . . . So that's what the aristocracy is like. . . . What can I say to her ? . . . Why not tell her that he killed himself, and that his poem only confirms it. . . . She's got such terrible eyes. . . . Why does she want to know ? " Then she stood up and walked over to the corner of the room, and, as though guessing my thoughts, said, " Yes, now I understand. Of course, it doesn't matter to you—that's why you said so. I quite forgot that you were one of the—new ones, the—what do you call it ?—the Komsomol."[1]

" It is hard for me to understand you, citizen princess," said I, getting up. " Can't you explain more clearly what you want from me ? Remember that we are class enemies."

[1] *Kom*munistichesky *So*yuz *Molo*dezhy (Young Communist League).

" Yes, Vitenka wanted to join your Komsomol also. But it's a blessing—a blessing for you that he didn't. For otherwise I would have cursed you, cursed you as a murderer, with the terrible curse of a mother—still, even that can mean nothing to you. . . . Let me explain why it matters to me. I am Victor's mother. If it had been only an accident, I would have been left with my personal, intolerable, all-consuming grief, but——" Here she had a coughing fit which lasted for quite a long time, just as if she were trying to make me feel sorry for her. I managed to collect my senses, and began to look at it all as an outsider ; it even seemed to me as though I were a spectator at a show and she a very fine actress—but one who was really thinking of other things while she was acting. " Well, then," said she, when she finished coughing, " if it was not—an accident, if he—did it himself, I must add to my own sorrow of a bereaved mother that immense inhuman sorrow which led him to destroy his young life. That's apart from that terrible injury he has caused me—his mother, his friend. . . . Why didn't he come to me and tell me ? It's because I'm—a princess. Did he forget that I had given the People my best years ? No, no, Vitenka ! " she cried, and wrung her hands as though she were trying to break them. " No, Vitenka ! this title of ours has been the curse that God has sent us for the sins of our

fathers ! But I'm your mother as well ! Don't you remember, when you were a little boy how you would come to me and confess all your little sins ? What did your mother say to you ? Did she ever punish you ? Did she ever say a harsh word ? Why, then, didn't you come to me now ? Why didn't you tell me, why didn't you ask me ? I would have explained it all to you ! "

I felt that if I stayed on much longer she would throw herself at me. My heart was beating fast. I slipped out of the room, and suddenly heard a thump. I looked into the room. She was lying on the bed, muttering : " Vitenka, my darling boy, how could you ? How could you, Vitenka ? " I walked down the street with a heavy heart—and the people seemed new and strange and joyful.

At the corner I noticed a girl of about eleven in a torn jumper and with a pioneer[1] tie. She had no galoshes on, and a piece of string was tied round one of her shoes—the sole must have been coming off. It was very cold, and the little girl kept hopping about to get warm.

" Cold, eh ? " I asked.

" Twelve below zero," she said, looking angrily at me.

" No, I mean, are you cold ? " I asked again.

[1] The Communist organisation for children under sixteen years of age—the League is for those over sixteen.

" Any of your business ? " she replied. " Don't hang around ; get out of my way ! "

" I don't know why you're sticking around here—you'll get all your fingers frozen. I'm like a guide—I ought to warn you."

" If you were a guide," said she, " you wouldn't be hanging round, interfering with my job."

The girl suddenly waved a handkerchief, and in the foggy dimness, at the other end of the lane, I saw another handkerchief waving at her.

It made me feel awkward, and I went home. But the feeling of depression, which my visit to Shahovskoy's mother had caused, soon passed away, and I thought it funny that I should be collecting impressions like a reporter.

December 29 :

I simply can't understand the meaning of to-day's incident. I went to see Nikpetozh and had a long talk with him ; but I shall write this talk down some other time ; now I must describe what happened to-day.

Just before I reached Nikpetozh, a girl with only a thin dress on (in spite of the cold) suddenly rushed out of a gateway, and, looking wildly round, began to yell for a militiaman. I asked her what was wrong, and she screamed :

" Come along, all of you ! I want witnesses ! Where's that damned militiaman ? He's always

sticking around, except when he's wanted ! "

" But what's happened ? " said I.

" Why am I bothering ? " she suddenly said, looking past me, " as if it was any business of mine ? . . . What do you want, anyway ? " she shouted at me. " Run along and get a militiaman, do you hear ? "

" Before I can call a militiaman I've got to know what's happened," said I. " Or else he won't come."

" What's happened ? " she said. " It's impossible to explain—it's both sad and funny. There's a fellow up there who's walked into a strange house and is making himself at home."

" What good would a militiaman be in a case like that ? " I asked. " Are there any tenants in the house, or not ? And who is he, anyway ? Our first duty is to fight against hooliganism. Come along, I'll try to kick him out, and, if I can't manage it, I'll call in the neighbours to help me."

" Well, you see, it's like this," said the girl, gaining confidence. " It's hard to make them out. You see, I'm living with a girl friend. Some fellow caught on to her in the street nearly a month ago, and hasn't left her alone ever since. In the street, too. She didn't know how to shake him off, and in the past few days he's managed to find out where she is living and has begun to call at the house. To-day he suddenly came along with some food and wine, and declared

that she had promised to marry him and that he was moving into our house. We called in Varvara Petrovna, our landlady—and he just kept on telling her the same yarn. Varvara Petrovna believed him, and went away. At this point my friend suddenly went into hysterics, but even that didn't put off the fellow, so that's why I ran for the militiaman."

"Is he tight, or what?" I asked.

"Not a bit of it. Quite sober, and so earnest—but so terribly determined. What can we do?"

Here I began to suspect that the girl must really have promised to marry him, and was now trying to get out of it. Women are so damned sly.

"Didn't she know him at all before?" I asked.

"Not in the least! I tell you he started talking to her in the street about a month ago. I was with her when it first happened."

"Well, did he say anything to her? I mean, did she answer him?"

"Well, what do you expect she answered except 'run along,' 'go to hell'; that's all she ever said to him."

"Are you sure she never asked him to the house?"

"Why, certainly not! She never asked him—and never even talked to him."

"That's queer. But perhaps they arranged something among themselves when you weren't

there? There's no smoke without fire, you know."

"I assure you, nothing like that ever happened," she said peevishly. "The girl doesn't know him at all—absolutely!"

"All right," said I, still not very convinced, "let's go and see what's wrong."

I must say that it all made me feel very awkward, although I showed no signs of it. But in the end I decided that, once a person asked for help, it couldn't be refused. I swung the door wide open. The girl kept hiding behind my back, and as I entered the flat she suddenly seized me by the sleeve and whispered: "But what if he's got a revolver?"

"Never mind," said I, "he has no right to shoot."

It was an amazing scene.

An ugly girl, who looked to me like a hunchback, was crouching in the corner of the little room; in the middle of the room there was a table covered with plates of food and bottles of wine; and in the other corner near the door, stood—Partisan, and smiled disdainfully.

"Ah, here's Riabtsov!" said he, before I had actually crossed the threshold. "So you've come to take part in the wedding feast. Sit down, sit down, make yourself at home. Nyura and I have decided to sign up at the registry office."

"It's a lie!" cried the girl in the corner,

with a terrified voice, " it's a lie ! I don't know him, we are perfect strangers. Make him get out ! "

" Don't take any notice of her," said Partisan, smiling affectionately ; " she has these queer turns sometimes. But she's a very good girl otherwise, and is very fond of me. Aren't you, Nyura ? "

But the girl jumped out of her corner, and, seizing a pickled herring from the table, threw it at Partisan. The herring turned a somersault and flopped juicily against the wall.

" A scene from married life," said Partisan. " Nyura's in a temper to-day. Let's go, Riabtsov."

" But, tell me, what's the matter ? " said I, as we walked along the street.

" How, ' what's the matter ' ? " said he. " It's perfectly simple : I want to marry her, and she's playing the fool for a bit—like all women."

" But who is she, anyway ? " I inquired.

" She's a workwoman at the *Lux* factory."

I had expected Partisan to hedge and tell lies, or refuse to answer my questions, and was prepared to give him a good lecture. But he answered me in quite a simple and straightforward way, looking earnestly into my eyes—so that I really hadn't anything more to ask him.

The most curious thing is that he isn't staying at the hostel any longer—the devil only knows

where he's staying ; he must have decided to quit.

December 30 :

There is no one at the hostel and I'm feeling very lonely. I feel I ought to turn my energy to something, for I don't seem to be myself without any work.

I hadn't time to do it yesterday, but I shall try to record to-day my talk with Nikpetozh. It appears he has thrown up his work at the secondary school and also at Vanka's factory, and is now working at some office. He greeted me in a very friendly way and at first we talked of the brighter sides of life. I told him of some of my difficulties—such as the question whether one had the right to interfere with other peoples lives, and he expressed some interesting ideas on the subject. Then he suddenly said : " There was an English writer who made the perhaps unfounded, but nevertheless interesting, hypothesis about men and spiders. His idea was that at some prehistoric period the earth was ruled by spiders. They were—brr !—enormous beasts and did whatever they pleased. They were strong, quick, and cunning, but they lacked one thing—a brain. The earth was covered with a cobweb, the threads of which were as strong as rope. The spiders destroyed everything living with their terrible jaws. Moving about with enormous speed—you have noticed, Kostya,

how spiders don't run or crawl, but *move about* —they were able to surround and destroy any enemy, wherever he came from——"

"Allow me, Nicolai Petrovich—but surely this is quite absurd and entirely contrary to the theory of evolution we were taught at school. We know quite well that we've come from a cell, and that eventually this developed into dinosaurs and pterodactyls, and certainly not into spiders. So where did you get your story?"

"But I've told you it's merely an hypothesis, the artistic fantasy of some English writer—I forget his name."

"It's a morbid fantasy, anyway."

"A fantasy—yes; but I'm not so sure about it's being morbid. There isn't anything left of your pterodactyls, but there are—still spiders. Do you know that there are spiders in Brazil half a metre in diameter, who crouch on trees waiting for something to pass. And, when any living animal passes, they leap down on their victim and kill it with one bite of their powerful poisonous jaws, and then suck its blood."

"How can you say that there's nothing left of pterodactyls? Don't you try to pull my leg, Nicolai Petrovich. There are even images, prints of certain species of pterodactyls."

"Yes—but there are *living* spiders, and not merely prints. According to that hypothesis I told you about, the brain of the ape began to grow twice as fast as that of the spider, because

nature needed some earnest and quiet constructive work instead of the destruction which the spiders caused. And at last the time came when the brain of the apes became so well organised that they were able to put up a fight with the spiders. They lured the spiders into their own nets and destroyed them."

"Well, I don't know about that, Nicolai Petrovich," said I. "I've heard so many strange things from you recently that nothing you say surprises me. Only I don't see the point of all this tale about the spiders."

"A tale?" said Nikpetozh, with a mysterious snigger. "Well, I suppose it's no good talking to you about it: you're a rationalist, a materialist, a Marxian. But tell me this, Citizen Rationalist," he suddenly whispered, bending over to me, "tell me this: Why has every human being an innate aversion to spiders? Aversion isn't the right word—but terror, horror. You'll find any number of people who'll take a lizard into their hand, the descendant of one of your dinosaurs. Not a single man is disgusted with mice or afraid of them. Snakes can be touched—and even trained. But find me a human being who would be prepared to put a spider inside his shirt. Brr! it's horrible to think of it. But we've got to overcome this fear. We've got to! For, if we don't, we will go mad. And do you know that I have a pain in the top layer of my brain? Just here. It's all due

to the spiders—or, rather, due to one particular spider. There he is ! A highly objectionable creature."

Almost sick with disgust, I jumped to my feet and looked. Nikpetozh was pointing to the middle of the floor. But I could see nothing.

" You've a queer sense of humour," said I ; " I can't see anything on the floor."

" You can't see it ? But there it is ! " said he, walking carefully round the spot he had pointed at. " A big one, too. A huge, hairy one ! He sleeps during the day—that's why I'm able to talk so freely."

" But at night—does he move about ? " I asked, for the truth was beginning to dawn on me.

" No, the brute won't move ! " he exclaimed in despair. " He sits there all the time, sometimes only rubbing one leg against the other. I don't know what he wants. Though my brain hurts me, at least I've got a brain. So I can beat him at the game. If only I had a machine-gun. You haven't a machine-gun, Kostya, have you ? However, I don't need it."

" Why don't you need it? " said I mechanically—merely to say something.

" He's a cunning devil ! I once brought along a hatchet and wanted to throw it at his ugly face. But he vanished, leaving only his outline on the floor—a print—something like your pterodactyls."

" That's an hallucination, Nicolai Petrovich," said I softly. " You are unwell ; you had better see a doctor."

" Do you think so, Kostya ? Well, maybe you are right." Nikpetozh suddenly grew weak and flabby, as though the bones had been taken out of him. " I've no time for doctors," he said. " And the worst of it is that, if you had been in my place, you would have killed him, destroyed him long ago. But I—I can't. I haven't any of that—what do you call it again ?—military activism. I can't. I can't."

He shook me warmly by the hand, and repeated once more : " I can't."

January 1, 1926 :

I was at the funeral of a famous poet yesterday, and I felt so miserable and lonely that I decided to go and see Korsuntsev. An annoying thing happened. As usual I walked down the passage at the hostel and, opening the door of his room, went in. But at that very moment I heard a yell from the other end of the room : " Don't come in ! " and I saw Korsuntsev looking very red in the face, and a woman whom at first I didn't recognise. Only afterwards, when she rushed past me, I realised that it was the charwoman they employ at the hostel.

Korsuntsev jumped on me for walking in without knocking. I began to explain that I had

always walked in like that before. Then I asked Korsuntsev if he really wasn't afraid of having to pay child-compensation.

"There are worse things than compensation," he said. "Let's rather go to Uncle Peresvet to celebrate the new year."

It is 5 p.m. now ; I have only just got up, and I've got a headache.

January 3 :

I got a big surprise when I went to Vanka's factory yesterday. I went to have a talk with him, but when he saw me he said, with an excited and concerned expression : "You have come in time. I believe we are going to need your evidence."

"What's wrong ? " I said.

"Well, there's a rotten business on about Partisan."

"Wait a minute ! " said I. "Isn't *Lux* the name of your factory ? "

"Yes, Red *Lux*. Why ? "

"All right. Tell me first what's wrong with Partisan and what you want my evidence for."

"It's hard to explain it in two words. You'll have to give a personal study of Partisan as a man. You see, it's a kind of trial which has been arranged at Partisan's own request. Remember that the workers are all very excited about it."

" But what's he done ? "

" He's injured a working girl."

" Is her name Nyura ? "

" Yes—but how do you know ? "

At that moment we entered the club-room, which was packed to the utmost—the people actually seemed to be sitting on top of each other. Women were in the majority. I climbed with Vanka on to the platform, and from there, behind the scene, and looking down, I saw some familiar faces sitting round the præsidium table—Zykova, Pashka Brychev, and Ganya Cheezh. At one end of the platform I saw the hunchback girl at whose house I had discovered Partisan that day. " At last this puzzle is going to be solved," I said to myself. The chance was gone of discussing my own affairs with Vanka. Zykova got up and, ringing the bell, said : " We have arranged this social trial because the case is a very unusual one, and the defence presents certain social difficulties. There is, of course, an article in the Soviet code against forcing a woman to cohabitation. But this article hardly applies to the present case. The point is that a University student called Trifonov (here I learned Partisan's name for the first time) is charged with an offence, but, being a real proletarian himself, and not a nepman or spesh,[1] he has asked us to try him according to strict proletarian standards, and without any

[1] Technical specialist.

mercy—and we are therefore trying him at this general meeting on a show of hands. Comrade Petukhov will state the case."

Vanka walked quickly on to the platform.

"A woman worker at our factory, Nyura Kvassina by name, has complained several times to the Communist Unit of having been pestered in the street by a certain citizen. This person is also said to have gone to her house against her will and to have declared that she had agreed to marry him. The Unit was unable to do anything, as it knew neither the citizen's name nor address. He was also very successful in bluffing Kvassina's next-door neighbours and her landlady, and even the militiaman. So it went on for over a month. Kvassina was driven to such a point that she stopped spending the night at home, and even left her house for three or four days on end—but it was all in vain. The unknown citizen kept stopping her in the street and engaging in quite unpermissible conversations. Not until New Year's Eve, when some of our fellows went to Kvassina's house, did we identify the citizen in question. I regret to say that he turned out to be a good friend and University colleague of mine—Trifonov. Let him explain what exactly he wanted from Kvassina ; for my own part, I can only say that his past career in the Civil War is all to his credit, although this, of course, has really very little to do with the present case——"

" You mean : *nothing* to do with it," said Zykova.

" Well, that's for you to decide," said Vanka calmly. " But the important point is this : that Trifonov is willing to accuse himself. This greatly simplifies our task—for I must say that this isn't a case of simple hooliganism, but a much more complicated one. I shall call him in now."

The crowd in the hall grew excited, but Zykova rang the bell and said :

" You can call him in if you like, but we must first hear what the plaintiff has got to say."

Partisan came in and stood still near the curtain with a gloomy expression on his face.

" Kvassina, tell us all about it," said Zykova.

" But I can't—there's nothing to tell," she said, almost inaudibly.

" Speak up ! Speak up ! " the crowd shouted.

" Well, this one—I don't know his name—won't leave me alone," said the girl softly, gasping for air. " I don't know him at all—who is he ?—coming to my house—bringing wine-bottles—why ? "

" Did he insult you ? " said Zykova.

" How do you mean—insult ? " said Kvassina.

" Well, did he paw you, kiss you—against your will ? "

" No, there was nothing like that," Kvassina whispered.

"But perhaps you knew him before?" Zykova suggested.

"I never knew him—to hell with him!" Kvassina suddenly shrieked. "Can't he leave me in peace? Am I a beauty—or a prostitute? I didn't touch him. He kept coming up to me, dressed up like a swell, like a sweetheart. 'Nyura,' he said, 'we are old friends, and I'm very fond of you,' and he also said that I had promised to marry him. . . . I never heard anything like it," she suddenly blurted out, and red marks showed on her face.

"Is that true, Citizen—Trifonov?" said Zykova.

"Quite true," said Partisan loudly.

"Perhaps you will be good enough, citizen, to tell us with what mysterious object in mind you kept pestering this person?" Zykova asked.

"She hasn't told you the whole story yet," Partisan remarked.

"How do you mean—not the whole story?" said Kvassina, with an air of surprise. She stood facing Partisan, at the other side of the platform, and kept staring at him, following every movement he made, as though she expected something unpleasant to happen. "Not the whole story?" she repeated. "Oh, yes, he also brought me presents. He brought me some kind of ribbon. What the devil would I want his ribbons for? I can earn enough to buy a ribbon if I want one! Remember this, comrades," she

suddenly shrieked, " that I've flung all his presents out of the window ! I don't want him ! I don't want his presents ! Why should I take presents from such a versailles ? "

" Why Versailles ? " said Vanka.

" In the Paris Commune the bourgeois and rascals were called versailles—and that's the kind he is. . . . Why are you laughing, Petukhov ? If you laugh, I'll stop talking. Damn you all ! "

" But I'm not laughing," said Vanka. " When did I ever laugh ? " (Indeed, I don't remember noticing him laugh at her.) " I simply didn't understand at first what you meant."

" Again she hasn't told you the whole story," said Partisan, with a kind of cheerless smile.

" I shan't say any more ! " Kvassina cried. " Look at him—he's laughing too, as though you were trying me and not him at all ! He made a fool of me in the street, and then at home, and now he's trying to make a fool of me here ! It's a bit thick, comrades ! " she yelled all in one gasp. A murmur of indignation passed through the audience. Partisan faced the crowd and said calmly :

" I wasn't making fun of her, comrades. It's the twitch of my mouth, due to the wound in my head."

" All the same," said Zykova with an embarrassed air, " you might tell us yourself

exactly what happened. The whole thing is becoming more and more of a puzzle to me."

"That's right! Let him tell us! Who is he? What sort of fellow is he?" the audience shouted.

"I shall tell you everything, comrades," he said, turning to the crowd. "I wanted this trial among my own people, and without the interference of the militia. Only listen to me patiently—after all, I am your comrade, a proletarian like yourselves."

There was a dead silence in the hall and the people pricked up their ears. An old woman in the first row put her hand to her ear, in order to hear better.

"I shall start at the very beginning," said Partisan. "I shall tell you of the Civil War, not because I want to justify myself or because I want you to see my past merits, but simply because it will be hard for you to understand me otherwise. Yes, I was at all the fronts and have, as they say, spilled my blood for the Republic. I have been wounded in the head and in the stomach, not to mention several cases of shell-shock. Mind you, I don't want you to pity me! These wounds are merely the direct evidence that I have taken part in the Civil War. Most of you, comrades, must know what that war was like. It was as if a man had been kept under lock and key, without light and air, for ten or twenty years, and had suddenly been let out

into the open. Such a man would absorb light and air not only with his lungs, but with his whole being. And for most of us the Civil War was that light and air in which we all bathed. I am over thirty now, comrades—but then I was only a little over twenty. Everything within me was seething with life—and then, like strong liquor, this Civil War was added to all the excitement of youth. From the lousy trenches of the Tsarist War I was sent into the sweet-smelling freedom of the grassy steppes—and I knew then that I was defending that freedom——"

"Cut out this poetry!" someone shouted from among the audience.

"To understand the point of my story we can't do without this poetry," said Partisan. "In the Civil War all the blood and dirt turned into poetry. I don't know about others, but I certainly looked not at the earth, not at the people, but upwards. . . . This is hard to explain —but then our brains were on fire. Otherwise how can you explain how the lousy, tattered rabble that we were managed to knock down and destroy those well-clothed, well-fed, technically equipped enemies of ours? You know quite well, comrades, that what guided us was the Revolution—and the Revolution is poetry. And when we, with our flaming heads, and hands still hot with the fire of machine-guns, returned to the deserted and broken, tumbled

down towns and factories, in order to build up a new world, there is little wonder that some of us lost courage and our heads cooled. We were back in a dull, prosaic world, comrades. And, after breathing the air of the steppes and the smell of gunpowder, many of us could not take in at once that the prosaic life also had a poetry of its own. As for me, I haven't been able to take it in yet."

" Allow me, citizen," said Zykova suddenly. " I don't think this is really to the point. What do we care for his poetry or whether he has taken anything in or not. To hell with it ! No, he had better tell us why he insulted that girl—and without any embroidery, please ! "

" But why ? " said Partisan vigorously—and I remembered the poem he had read that night.

" Let me speak, comrades. I have been silent quite long enough."

" Yes, let him, Zykova ! " the audience shouted. " After all, he's one of ours——"

" Yes," said Partisan pensively, " it is no easy task to put oneself *above* this everyday prose, when one's in the very thick of it—with one's studies, and worries, and constructive efforts. . . . It is only when you place yourself above all this that you begin to realise the new poetry, the romance of this prosaic, everyday life, and you are carried away."

Zykova laughed.

" Yes, you may laugh—I suppose it's funny—

but that's just where my tragedy came in. This terrible discord between the everyday life and the striving for poetry, for romance—— But no, I'm not using the right words. Mine are learned, bookish words—but at least I have some justification for using them. You—the proletarian class—have sent me to the University, and I have studied well and have learned all this bookish vocabulary."

" It's certainly that," said Zykova, unable to contain herself any longer.

" The vocabulary—yes, but not the substance. The intellectuals don't understand me, and they are strangers to me. I thought you might understand me," he continued in a kind of weary tone. . . . " Well, then ! Now about this Nyura girl. The prose of everyday life became impossible for me to accept. In the end I revolted against it, against the destructive yoke of this life. But my protest was a miserable, futile, ridiculous protest, the very nature of which was hostile to my own class, to you, to Socialism, to everything that I am living for. I tried to build up a life on different lines, and, rushing into it as I did, I found myself in a dead alley. I said to myself : she's an ugly girl, a hunchback—she has undoubtedly a sad, lonely life. Let me try to make her existence radiant and beautiful ; it will also be a protest on my part against the ordinary prosaic everyday life around me. . . . So I had a shot at it. I stopped

her in the street, and told her that we were old friends—my aim, you see, was to give life and substance to my dream. . . . And the result was absurd. I realise it myself. She got a fright, and started calling for help—a girl friend at first, then her landlady, Varvara Petrovna, and finally the militia. Oh, to hell!" Partisan exclaimed in a weary, tired voice. "I only wished her well—that Nyura. But she sought shelter against my romanticism in all that was most dull and prosaic—and she knocked me over with it. I once knew a comrade," he continued after a brief pause, "who, finding himself in a similar position, smashed up his head with a hand grenade. But I—I'm different. I've come here, comrades. I'm a criminal, for I've committed a crime against my own class. Perhaps I'm wrong to have become detached from you, to have taken my studies too seriously. But I shall consider your verdict as final."

As soon as he stopped talking, a rustle and murmur passed through the audience. It was clear at once that the people were not much impressed by the speech.

"Well, then," said Zykova, "who wants to express an opinion? For my own part, I still don't see the point of this whole story. I believe we were wrong to have started this whole business at all. This ought to have been taken up by an official, government law-court—they would have found out soon enough what article

to apply to this prose-and-poetry existence! Besides, for all we know, he might have wanted to rape her. And all this big structure of his is just bluff."

"Look here," said Vanka Petukhov angrily, "Kvassina herself has told us that there was nothing like that in the whole business. You are talking nonsense, Zykova. To look at you, one might think you had only one object in mind—to get a fellow into jail. Remember that he's our comrade. I've shared a room with him for six months, and I can vouch for him——"

"Listen, comrades," Pashka Brychev suddenly said, jumping to his feet, "suppose we do this: well, you see, Nyura Kvassina keeps saying that she didn't know him. But listen, comrades, I know from my own experience—it is a hard job with these girls—a hard job. Let us therefore introduce them properly to each other. So that she might know him. Then everything will go fine. . . . What are you devils laughing at?"

"That's right, comrades," said a worker, amid wild laughter in the audience, "Pashka Brychev certainly has a hard time with the girls." Ganya Cheezh got up and went up to the platform. "I don't agree with Zykova," she said. "This comrade has come to us for a fair trial—so it would never do to send him away. He is a valuable man, so Vanka Petukhov says. I quite agree that he should be acquitted

provided he doesn't permit himself anything like this again. He mustn't harm any more young girls—I mean——"

There was a noise in the hall. Everybody turned round, and I saw Fedorych, the chairman of the factory committee, pushing his way through the crowd to the platform.

" That's no good, comrades ! " he kept yelling. " Listen to me—I'll tell you something. I know this young fellow," he shouted, climbing up the platform. " It's Vaska Trifonov, he's one of ours ; the two of us have fed lice together. I know Vaska all right ! At the station buffet at Kharkov he snatched a plate of salad straight from under General Mayevsky's nose. He acted as a waiter—he was in our reconnoitring service. It still gives me a belly-ache to think of it. The general wanted his salad—but Vaska had taken it away."

" Chuck it, Fedorych," said Partisan peevishly ; " don't make a fool of yourself. This is a serious business——"

" But I'm quite serious, too," said Fedorych, " here ; I've met an old pal of mine, and you come along and tell me I'm not serious ! "

" Allow me to make a concrete proposal," said Vanka Petukhov. " Seeing that I know Trifonov, and Fedorych knows him too, I suggest that he and I vouch for him—and that we refrain for the present from a vote of censure."

Although Zykova was against it, a whole

forest of hands was put up supporting Vanka's proposal.

Vanka then came up to me, and, shaking me warmly by the hand, whispered : " You take him along to the hostel now, and mind you keep an eye on him. It wouldn't be a bad thing if you could introduce him to some nice girls."

" What are you afraid of? " I asked.

" Ah, you never know," said he elusively.

Just now Partisan is lying on his bed and reading. I shall try to get hold of Vera tomorrow.

January 5 :

Although this seems a trifling matter, I shall mention it because it may not be the end of it.

I went to see Korsuntsev, although he obviously isn't one of ours, and merely covers himself up with phraseology.

I have an idea that he's going to reveal his real self some day. But he'll have to do it himself. I am the only person who watches him carefully, and weighs up all his words and actions, but even I couldn't draw a life-size portrait of him for lack of sufficient material. And yet I ought to do it, for I know that he's an enemy, though a hidden enemy—but then those are the most dangerous ones.

Well, then, while I was sitting in his room, a bourgeois-looking girl suddenly came in. I

didn't recognise her at first, but then I realised that I had seen her at that foxtrot party where I had got a bit drunk and had kicked up a row.

Korsuntsev jumped up, and, dropping that slovenly, superior way of talking which I hate so much, he started wriggling like a stray whom a militiaman has caught by the scruff of the neck.

" I'm awfully sorry, Zizi," he said, " I haven't even got a chair to offer you. We have only stools here, you see."

" That's quite all right," said Zizi. " Do you mind if I sit on the bed ? "

" Do, Zizi," said Korsuntsev. " Anywhere you like, so long as you can make yourself comfortable. You remember this bird, don't you ? "

" Yes, I do," said she, crossing her legs so that I could see her garters ; " wasn't it he who made that programme speech at the foxtrot party ? "

" That's me," said I, and felt a silly expression coming over my face. This annoyed me. " And do you still go on polishing the floors ? "

" What floors ? " said Zizi, taking out her mirror and beginning to powder her nose.

" Just floors," said I. " I call your foxtrots polishing floors."

" Don't be so rude, Riabtsov," said Korsuntsev. " If you don't want to dance, no one is forcing you to do it. . . . Didn't you say you had to go and see the University Registrar about something ? "

" Oh, that can wait," said I, in order to annoy him. " This is such pleasant company —I simply couldn't leave you."

There is an unwritten law in hostels that if two fellows are in a room and a girl comes to see one of them, the other one must leave the room—at least go out into the passage and wait until the girl goes away. But I decided to annoy both of them.

" You say you like our company," said Zizi, " and yet you behave as though you were going to be insolent again."

" It all depends on what you call 'insolent,'" said I. " I suppose you'd like me to pay you compliments and tell you what a lovely complexion you've got. But I don't believe in that. Now, if I give you my real and candid opinion, you are sure to think me impertinent."

" Not at all," said Zizi, after a pause, " I hate compliments and I always like to hear the truth. And I'd be really *awfully* interested to hear your real and candid opinion, as you call it. Tell me, and we'll be friends."

" No, he had better keep his mouth shut," said Korsuntsev, beginning to feel uneasy, " or he'll start talking such bunk that it'll give you a toothache."

" You're very rude yourself, Nix," said Zizi, " but really, Kostya, won't you tell me your opinion? Of course, you know, I'm a flirt, but then we all are—may God forgive us. Tell me!"

" You want to catch me, don't you ? " I thought to myself. " But just you wait." So I said to Korsuntsev :

" You evidently believe that you alone can say clever things ; and I've gone on listening to you for a long time now. But I feel that there's something putrid about your cleverness. And I can tell you also——"

" Let's have your opinion ! Come on ! " said Zizi, interrupting me and clapping her hands. " Come on, tell me, or I'll be angry with you."

" Well, in case you get angry, I'm going to tell you at once," said I, with a graceful " society " bow. " Here's my opinion : I can't stand powdered snouts."

There was a moment of dead silence. Then Korsuntsev jumped up and said :

" Riabtsov, come along into the passage. I've got to say something to you."

" To hell with the passage ! " said I cheerfully. " It's cold out there. You can do all your talking here."

" I'm not joking, Riabtsov," said he savagely ; " get out into the passage, do you hear ? "

" Ah, so you're chasing me out," said I calmly, and began to get up lazily. " In that case, you needn't bother seeing me out. Goodbye, Zizi ! " She said nothing, and I went out. Korsuntsev didn't follow me.

But no sooner had I opened the door than a woman leaped aside. I looked closely, and

recognised even in the twilight the charwoman whom I had once found in Korsuntsev's room, and whom he had tickled once or twice in my presence.

As I was going out, she suddenly came running after me and seized me by the sleeve.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Are there any other fellows in there?" she asked.

"In where?"

"In that room there—with that pig—Korsuntsev?"

"Is that what you call him?" I laughed. "No, there's no one there—except a lady visitor."

"Ooh, the pig!" she said in a strange, threatening tone.

I went away. Now that I think of it, Korsuntsev seems to be a real swine if he can carry on with that foxtrot female in the presence of another woman.

Anyone who knew anything about hostels would know what they were doing in that room—he wouldn't even need to look through the keyhole.

January 7:

I met Vera yesterday; she had just come back from her aunt's place in the country; so that's why she was never in when I called during these last few days. But I didn't get a chance

to talk to her properly. But to-day she called for me at the hostel, and it was a fine day, so we decided to go out for a stroll.

I began in a vague sort of way. " Tell me, Vera," I said, " what would you do if you got a chance to help a comrade in need ? "

" It would depend on the need he was in," said she, without a moment's hesitation.

" Well, suppose a comrade was sinking into a marsh, and you were passing by—what would you do ? Would you try to pull him out ? "

" Do you think I'm such a fool ? If he was sinking into a marsh, he would be a fool : for why would he walk across a marsh without taking the necessary precautions ? And, besides, if I went into the marsh after him, it would do him no good, for I couldn't pull him out, and would only get stuck myself. It would be too silly—two people sitting in a marsh trying to save each other."

" Well, I suppose you'd be right not to get into the marsh. But what would you do in such a case ? "

" What would I do ? I'd call a meeting of the nearest soviet, and would have them discuss the matter right away."

" Don't be stupid. That's a purely girlish way of looking at it. What I want is a serious solution."

" But I'm quite serious," said Vera, getting

angry; " that's exactly what I would do under the circumstances."

" But while you were holding a meeting the man would be sucked in."

" That's quite uncertain. But even if a single individual were drowned, it wouldn't matter so terribly ; on the contrary, it would act as a stimulant for taking measures to prevent the same thing happening again."

I had to admit to myself that she was right again, and decided to put the question in another way.

" Very well, then," said I, " let's take a different case. Suppose a comrade of yours was drinking himself to death, or not even a comrade—any man—say, an old cabman. Driving about during the day and getting blind drunk every night."

" I should worry ! " said Vera indifferently. " There are plenty of drunkards about, and plenty of vodka. Besides, how could I save a drunk man—for the moment I got near him he'd start pawing me. I've had some experience of drunk men, I can tell you. And no local soviet, or anybody else, can be of any use. The thing to do is to put them in jail and give them treatment. Or else prohibit vodka altogether —only the State Budget couldn't stand that, for if they prohibited vodka, everybody would be making his own liquor and using up the grain."

Much to my disappointment, I had to agree with her again.

" All right, I can't argue with you—you're too clever for me," said I. " But just take a case like this." And I told her the whole story of Partisan and the hunchback girl. Vera's expression suddenly changed, and she seemed to prick up her ears.

" Is that quite true ? " said she, after listening to my account of the trial, in which I had specially emphasised the speech of the defence. " Are you sure you haven't made it up ? "

" Of course I haven't made it up," said I.

" My personal opinion," said Vera, " is that that damned girl was simply trying to put up her price. But tell me—is she pretty ? "

" I don't know what you mean by pretty," said I—for I simply can't stand that word —" but she's not too bad—rather pale, though."

" And is the fellow—good-looking ? "

" Oh, yes, very. At least, I think so."

" Well, then, will you let me meet him ? "

" What do you want to meet him for ? " said I, feeling very pleased, for that was all I wanted from her.

" Because he's an unusually interesting fellow," said she, " not plain and commonplace like the rest—and that's the kind I like."

" But remember—he's almost an invalid.

He's been wounded umpteen times—and in the head, too. So he's a bit—queer, you see."

"Fifteen bayonet and three bullet wounds,"

she quoted from some poet or other. "Yes, you must let me see him—soon!"

"Why soon?"

"Because if we put it off too long, he may do something crazy in the meantime."

"Well, do you want to see him now?"

"Why, certainly! Come along."

When we got to the hostel, we found Vanka and Partisan in the room. I gave Vanka a wink, and introduced him to Vera. He gave me a kind of doubtful look; perhaps he didn't like Vera, or else he thought her too young. I felt a little embarrassed and didn't know very well how to get on with the business. But Vera took the matter into her own hands. For, after sitting there for a while, she suddenly said, quite loudly:

"I suppose that fellow in the corner is a very learned person?"

"Yes, we've learned a lot," Partisan growled to himself.

"Why are you so angry, comrade?" said she.

"Life isn't over-cheerful, is it?" said Partisan.

Then Vera suddenly jumped up, and, going up to him, tapped him on the shoulder and said:

" I'm just going to the University, comrade. Will you see me to it ? "

" It's a bourgeois habit," said he. " And, besides——"

" Besides—what ? " said Vera.

" Besides, I can't find my cap."

" But it's there, hanging on the wall," said she, pointing to his cavalry cap.

Partisan got up, and as he stood there beside Vera, he seemed twice her size.

" You're a hefty one, aren't you," said Vera, in feigned terror, " not a chicken like me ? "

We laughed, and it seemed to me that Partisan, too, gave a smile.

" All right, come on then," said he gruffly. " I've got to go to the University myself, anyway."

" I wonder what on earth he wants to go to the University for ? " said Vanka, after they went out.

But I made no reply. My heart seemed to have stopped, and I felt as if there were a Toricelli vacuum inside me. And when I remembered Vera, and how she used to feed me on student sausage, I very nearly ran after them.

I tried to console myself with the thought that Vera would consider this entry into Partisan's life as something she had done on her own initiative, while in reality it had all been planned by Vanka and me.

" They'll manage all right now," said Vanka,

with a grin. As for myself, I couldn't help going out into the street, and I have only just returned and am now writing it all down.

January 8:

The shepherd has come back to town, and speaks so enthusiastically about the winter in the country that it makes me quite envious. Then I asked him about the general feeling in the country, and he made a sour grimace.

"They are still digging about in their own dung," said he, "and are quite incapable of looking at things from the point of view of the State. They haven't enough active people among them."

"What kind of people?" I asked.

"Pushers—real Communists," he replied.

"A real Communist, or even an intellectual, in a village would not only be a treasure, but a *power*. I don't mean the kind who would be reading out party programmes, but one who would get things done. But where can one find them?"

At this point I suddenly remembered Nikpetozh.

"But suppose, Finagent," I said, "we try to send an intellectual there? I know one who is out of work just now."

"That's not a bad idea," said he, "only what kind of work could he do?"

" Well, I don't suppose he'd be much good at carting dung or ploughing a field, but he would be very useful for—explaining things ; he could explain anything to them."

" It would be rather a bothersome business," said the shepherd, " to get him a job as a local executive secretary. He'll have to go through so many stages, and it's a hopeless job to get anything done with that stupid bureaucracy all over the place. Is he registered at the labour exchange ? "

" I'm damned if I know."

" It might be easier to get him a job as a teacher. The Workers' Education Department would simply jump at him. But would he be willing to teach ? "

" He *is* a teacher."

" I see. But then why isn't he working in the town ? It should be easy enough for a good teacher to get a job."

" Of course, he's a good teacher. The finest teacher I've ever come across."

" Well, then, let's go and talk to him."

As we went along I felt a little apprehensive about Nikpetozh's frame of mind. What if he had already reached the point of attacking people ? Or perhaps he would try to frighten us again with his spiders ? But, as I had decided that the spiders were just a result of his loneliness, I didn't attach much importance to it.

When we got there, I was horrified at the state of poverty in which Nikpetozh was living. He had burned the few chairs he had had, and his room was dirty and thick with smoke. There was a greenish stone lying on the table, which later turned out to be a loaf of bread. And I had never seen anything more horrible than the state of his bed.

I introduced the shepherd to Nikpetozh, and the shepherd began to expound his ideas about the needs of intellectual co-operation in the country districts.

" But in what capacity ? " Nikpetozh asked.

" Why, say, as a teacher."

"I can't do that," said Nikpetozh. "It would mean repeating the whole thing all over again, and I'm not strong enough for that. And the worst of it is that I'd get back to the same place where I started out ; it would be a case of running round in a circle. So far as teaching's concerned, I see no difference between the town and country."

" Yes, but look at the other teachers : they get poor pay, they have constant rows with the village officials, the houses aren't heated—but still they go on working."

" Well, most of those people are young men full of heroic, revolutionary enthusiasm. I admire them with all my heart, but I can't do what they do. I am forty-nine, and my best years are over."

"In that case," said the shepherd thoughtfully, "I'm afraid it'll be hard to find something for you. And yet the country so desperately needs workers like you. The country needs *brains*."

"I know what I'll do," said Nikpetozh, interrupting him. "The feeling of my uselessness has poisoned my life in the town ; it has brought me to a point of getting hallucinations. Kostya knows," he added, with a pitiful kind of smile. "Only one can't go anywhere in the winter. But when the spring comes I'll take a stick and a bundle, and walk out of this town into the open fields. I'll wander from farm to farm, from village to village. I might lend a hand in the field here, and read them a paper there. . . . And so, perhaps, they'll keep me alive. It's a long time since I've had a proper look at the country. In fact, town-dwellers like myself don't really know the country at all. At one time we believed in 'going into the people,' but, in spite of all their heroism, these exploits always had either a comic or a sad ending. It was the same with all the later attempts of the *intelligentsia* to get in touch with the country—except in the case of doctors, teachers, agrarian specialists, etc. But that wasn't real *penetration*, either. It was more like the penetration of a dentist's instrument into the patient's mouth. It didn't in the least affect his whole organism. So you see, I'm going to wait till spring comes."

" Why the hell wait, comrade ? " said the shepherd impatiently.

" Don't you think it'll be cold now ? " said Nikpetozh, with a smile that recalled some of that old humour of his, which I hadn't seen for so long.

" They'll give you a fur coat," said the shepherd.

" Who will ? "

" Your chiefs."

" I haven't any chiefs. And if you are thinking of social insurance, I can tell you that, first of all, I haven't deserved it so far, and secondly——"

" To hell with that ! And to hell with your social insurance. But you're going to get a coat all the same."

" What for ? Shall I be a night-watchman, or what ? Wearing a warm coat and walking round the village shaking a rattle ? "

" You intellectuals are wonderful prophets You seem to know everything before you've been told anything."

" I'm sorry," said Nikpetozh warmly, touching the shepherd's hand. " You are quite right. I'm sorry. I shall listen to you."

" All right, cut out your apologies," said the shepherd. " I'm talking business to you—so never mind your apologies. You say, then," said the shepherd in a familiar tone, " that you want to get to know the country and that you

want the country to listen to you? Is that right?"

"That's right," said Nikpetozh, looking straight into the shepherd's eyes, with a kind of luminous expression.

"Can you explain it all to the peasants," said the shepherd, "in the right Soviet spirit, of course?"

"Why, naturally. I'm all in favour of it."

"Well, in that case, have you heard of the ring mail?"

"That's something mediæval, eh?"

"Mediæval be damned! It's the rural postal service. It goes round the tiniest villages in a kind of circle; it carries round letters, newspapers, money orders, and sells stamps, agricultural pamphlets, and little books on taxation, and the government's policy, and so forth."

"Never heard of it."

"Have you been deaf?"

"Quite possible."

"Well, then. This ring mail serving the villages hasn't yet been properly organised and isn't running very smoothly yet. Besides delivering letters, it is the duty of the ring postmen to get in touch with the rural population, to organise talks, travelling libraries, and so on. Would you be a ring postman?"

"Yes, I will," said Nikpetozh, getting up and getting his coat (it was pitiful to look at) and

his hat from the wall. " Where can I go to find out about it ? "

" At the General Post Office, of course," said the shepherd, getting up, too, and putting on his coat. " Can I help you in any way ? "

" No, that's all right ; I'll manage it myself," said Nikpetozh cheerfully. " I have all the necessary testimonials. Thank you, Kostya, for bringing this lad along. By the way, what are you, comrade ? I know you're a student—but apart from that ? Are you a responsible Communist—or what ? "

" I'm a shepherd," said the shepherd, as the three of us went out into the street. " That's how I know what the peasants need—looking at it as an outsider, I know it better than they do themselves."

January 10 :

To-day Shahov's (I mean Shahovskoy's) brother suddenly turned up at the hostel, and asked for me. He took me into the passage, where he asked me in detail about his brother's death, and was particularly anxious to know whether Stasya Velipolsky was connected with it, and when I said no he gave a doubtful snigger. I handed all Victor's poems and diaries over to him, and, after arranging to come and see me again, he went away. He has just come

from abroad. He is very tall and thin, and very like Victor—only his face is even greyer and more drawn-out, just like a horse. If all princes are like that, there isn't much to envy them for. He speaks in an abrupt way, and the clothes he was wearing were as poor as my own, if not worse.

January 13 :

Korsuntsev has run himself in, this time.

I went to his hostel to borrow the *History of the Communist Party*, which he is using at present, and which is doing the round of all the students. I met the charwoman in the passage and said good morning to her, but she only snorted. I naturally pretended that I didn't care a damn, and went past her. But suddenly she came running after me and said : " Tell that pig—that friend of yours—that I'll pour vitriol all over the hussy's face—tell him."

" You've gone mad, you fool," said I. " They'll shove you in jail for three years—that'll teach you."

" Let them kill me—but I shan't allow the two of them to carry on like this."

When I opened the door, I saw Korsuntsev and Zizi coming, arm in arm, towards me.

" Give me the *History of the Party*, Korsuntsev," said I.

" Take it—it's lying on the stool," said he,

and went into the passage with Zizi. I seized the book and ran after them, for I suddenly had a feeling that something would happen, and, although he's a scoundrel, I thought it better to warn him. But before I had time to open the door, I was deafened by the frightful shrieking of a woman. I dashed out into the passage, and saw Zizi covering her face with her hands, and squealing at the pitch of her voice. Korsuntsev had pinned the charwoman to the ground, and was trying to get something out of his pocket.

I could hear someone hurrying along the passage.

" Korsuntsev," I cried, but before I had time to say or do anything, he had pulled a penknife out of his pocket, opened it, and slashed it across the charwoman's face.

I jumped forward and seized him by the arm. I can't describe what happened next—everything got mixed up in wild, uproarious chaos. Somebody was pulling me, or I was pulling somebody else—I don't know—and then, suddenly, to my horror, I saw blood on the charwoman's face, and there was yelling and screaming for a long time—until at last the superintendent came running along.

I was still clutching Korsuntsev's arm. He was staring wildly—I thought for a moment he had gone crazy.

" Is this your doing, Korsuntsev ? " asked the superintendent, pointing at the charwoman.

"Go to hell!" said Korsuntsev in an indifferent tone of voice. "I don't care—to hell with everything!"

"You'll have to go to jail," said the superintendent.

"All right, if it's jail, it's jail," said Korsuntsev in the same tone. "Doesn't matter, does it? I'm sick to the teeth of the whole lot of you."

"And you'll probably be thrown out of the Unit," said the superintendent.

"B—— the Unit."

Everyone suddenly grew silent.

"Well, are you expecting a programme speech, citizens?" said Korsuntsev, with an air of mockery. "It's stupid to listen to hysterics. There'll be no programme speech. You can all go home. There was once a student called Korsuntsev, who expressed his chivalrous feelings and was sent to jail for it. Good-bye. To console you, I can tell you this—that you all stand an equally good chance of going to jail—to-day or to-morrow or some other day. And I'll tell you this also—that there's nothing easier in the world than pulling your legs. Any intelligent person can twist you round his little finger. You say to yourselves: here's a hundred-per-center, a devoted Communist, and that sort of thing. I tell you—it's all bunk!"

"Come on, Korsuntsev, come on," said the superintendent, pulling him along. "You've got yourself into a nice mess——"

After all, it turned out that the charwoman had missed Zizi's face and that the acid had merely hit the wall, and only her own face is disfigured with Korsuntsev's penknife. And that's what he called " chivalrous feelings."

January 16 :

Well, it's a wonderful world ! If I told them about it at the Communist League, they'd die with laughter. It gives me a belly-ache, too, each time I think of it. It's wonderful that such things can still be possible in our U.S.S.R. ! But sometimes it strikes me as not only strange, but a bit suspicious, too. I must write it all down, exactly as it happened, lest I forget. It may come in useful some day.

The point is that Volodya Shahov has been coming to see me during these past few days. (By the way, he seems to have changed his name for good, and I don't suppose it really matters to anyone in the U.S.S.R. whether he's a former prince or not.) I have already described his outward appearance, but that isn't the important point. He told me that he needed my company because I had been Victor's closest friend. That's nonsense, for no one was ever friendly with Victor. I think I was foolish to have shown Volodya Victor's last letter to me, and I have an idea now that he suspects me of being weak-minded. This letter describes me as a round,

oily ball which will pass through all the gates—and there are different ways of interpreting this. In any case, Volodya started hanging round me just as though I were a girl. I couldn't at all see what he was after. He talked on subjects which we have all, long ago, forgotten, and I said to myself that he must have picked them up abroad. In the first place he asked me what I thought of Christ.

I told him that my point of view was that of any sane and politically sound person—that according to Nemoevsky there had never been a Christ at all, and that it was a mere lunar myth; and that, according to Morozov's latest theory, which had only recently been published in the papers, there was a Christ who was of aristocratic birth, and who had lived four centuries after the time mentioned in all those gospel books. Personally, however, it didn't matter whether Christ had existed or not, for the important thing was his preaching. Volodya readily agreed with this, and said it didn't matter to him either whether Christ had existed or not, but that the doctrine of Christ was very important and was well worth studying. I then asked him if he belonged to the Living Church, and told him that a priest of the Living Church used to come and see my father, and he drank vodka like a pig, and when he got drunk he would say he was the Jewish god Jehovah. Since then, I said, I had no faith in any living

or dead Church. Volodya Shahov said that he didn't belong to any Church, but that he wanted to study the substance of Christ's teaching, which he would use as a spring-board for his conduct. To this I replied that we used Marx and Lenin as our spring-board, and that we needed no other. Volodya agreed with this, too—and that at once aroused my interest. Not that he agreed with it completely, for all he said was that the materialistic conception emphasised the essence of humanitarianism—which was not so much Christianity as a whole as the love of one's neighbour. I asked him how he would define this love, and expected him to expound some sloppy theory about good and evil. But what he said was this : in the first place, he said, the war and Revolution had brought about a general mental coarseness, and that was an intolerable thing. I agreed with this. On the other hand, he said, it would perhaps take a very long time before Socialism was completely built up, and the new human relations established ; and until that time we must try to cultivate the good relationship between all those people who hold this view. He said that if groups of five persons reasoning in the same way (so far as human relations were concerned) were formed all over the U.S.S.R., it would create a new atmosphere in which the building-up of Socialism would become much easier. This interested me greatly. Shahov then

confessed that some of these fives had already been formed, and that he was anxious to include me in one of them. When I asked him what it all meant, he said that these fives were known as the Free Brothers, and that the Government had nothing against them, seeing that they actually helped in the building-up of Socialism. I then asked him why nothing was known of these Brothers at the Communist League, to which he replied that the League was always very suspicious of any parallel organisations which were intended to influence the young generation, and that it had been decided not to mention the matter to the League, at least for a time, and that the Government had actually agreed even to that. I thought this rather fishy, for I couldn't really see why the Government should want to hide anything from the League ; but, all the same, I pretended to believe all he said, and asked him to put me in touch with his Brothers. That's where the real fun began.

As agreed, he called for me at 7 p.m. to-night, and we went off. As we had no money for the tram, we had to walk. We walked for a very long time till we got out of the town, and it took us at least half an hour to cross a snow-covered field and some patches of wood. There was a blizzard, and my face was all covered with rime, and it was becoming so hard to breathe that I nearly turned back ; but Shahov kept on

saying that we were nearly there, and frankly I didn't like to be beaten by the weather.

At last we reached a country house. There was no light in the windows, and I was sure there was no one in. But Volodya knocked four times, and a voice replied : " Who's there ? " " The initiated," said Volodya, and though it was all very creepy, I couldn't help laughing : it was too much like a conspiracy or like a Sherlock Holmes story.

" What is the most precious thing to you ? " said the voice from inside.

" The human soul," said Volodya. (" The dog's behind," said I to myself.)

The door opened, and, after going along a dark passage, we came into a well-lit hall with a lot of overcoats hanging on the rack. The maid (or whatever the hell she was), wearing a white apron, helped us to take off our coats, and we were taken into the next room. It was quite dark there, and Volodya whispered : " Sit down." We sat down on the sofa and stayed like that for five minutes. At last I asked : " Well, when's the ghost going to appear ? " But Volodya merely squeezed my hand, and I shut up. Suddenly a voice came from the darkness, and it gave me quite a creepy feeling. The voice said :

" Who is with you ? "

" A candidate for the Brotherhood," said Shahov.

" Is he ready for admission ? "

" Nearly ready."

" He shall be admitted to the communion with the younger members."

Someone suddenly put on the light, but there was no one in the room.

" What the hell——" said I to Volodya, but again he squeezed my hand.

" The mystery is over," said he. The mystery was over, no doubt, for the rest was just pure bunk. Again we went along the passage and were let into a little room, where I found a few young people. One of them was a girl, and, much to my surprise, I also saw—Pashka Brychev, from Vanka's factory, among them. I meant to go up to him, but he gave me a wink. I realised it was better not to show that we knew each other. I liked the idea, for it seemed to add another touch of mystery to the adventure. (Not that I believe in mystery, but in this particular case it came in quite useful.)

The meeting in the little room was run without a chairman, and anyone was allowed to talk whenever he liked. They all spoke in a soft and quiet way, and it was all very different from our stormy meetings at the University. I rather liked it at first, but I soon realised that the things they were discussing were really rather queer.

There was a flaxen-haired fellow, who said : " We must carry our neighbour like a precious

vessel—a precious vessel filled with a precious liquid, no drop of which must be spilled." (He actually said so !) " And after we have learned to treat our nearest, most beloved neighbour like that, we rise to a higher level, and begin to feel that general, universal love of which we ourselves become a part."

" Brother," the girl squeaked, " what would you do if spite crept into your neighbour's heart ? "

" Sister," said the flaxen-haired fellow, " this feeling must be smothered like a poisonous serpent."

Then I said :

" Well, but what would you do if your neighbour jumped on your toes or stuck his hand in your pocket ? "

" Your question shows bad taste, brother," said the flaxen-haired one. " Even in your communion with the Younger Brothers you are not allowed to ask such questions."

" But, after all, you can't start explaining to a neighbour who's shoved his hand in your pocket all about your *communion* business."

" Brother," said the fellow meekly, " you have evidently not yet been introduced to even the most elementary rules of our circles. The point is that in the Primary Communion only *two* Young Brothers can adopt the attitude of brotherly love towards each other. It is only when that love becomes strong

enough that it can be extended from one Brother to the group of five. That, of course, is no reason why you shouldn't love all other people at the same time. But you must be careful at first, for an inexperienced Brother is always apt to receive a shock from the materialist attitude of the world around towards him."

He spoke fluently, as though he were reading from a book, but his reference to materialism annoyed me.

" All right," said I, " I suppose you are right about only two Brothers loving each other in the first place—starting the ball rolling, so to speak. But what if one of them hasn't a room to live in, will the other give him his own room —out of a feeling of brotherly love, of course ? "

" Certainly," the girl squeaked, " he'll give his whole self away—not only his room."

I gave her a look : no, she wasn't much of a female, with her little red nose : it would be no fun becoming her brother. So I thought out a plan. I got up and said solemnly :

" Brothers ! I have fully accepted your teaching, and have become one of its faithful disciples. But may I be allowed to choose my own First Brother ? I am choosing this citiz—I mean this Brother."

I pointed at a well-fed and fairly well-dressed fellow. He scrutinised me from head to foot, screwed up his face (at least so I thought), and then bent down to the flaxen-haired fellow and

whispered something into his ear. The other one replied at once :

" But our new convert must remember this : that he, too, must make personal sacrifices for the sake of brotherly love. In any case, if your interests disagree with those of your First Brother, the matter must be referred to our meeting of the Younger Brothers. Do you make a solemn promise that this will be done ? "

" I give you my solemn promise," said I.

" And, besides, you must obey your First Brother at first, for he is wiser and more experienced than you."

" Yes, I shall obey him to the last whit," said I, raising my arm after the fashion of the German Communists ; " but allow me to ask you a tiny little question. How about Socialism ? " Everyone grew silent. Then the girl gave me a stare, like the crocodile at the zoo. The flaxen-haired one also stared, and then asked me : " I'm afraid I don't quite understand your question : ' How about Socialism ' ? "

" Is the building of Socialism to come—afterwards ? "

Pashka Brychev burst out laughing. The fat fellow—my First Brother—gave me an even more suspicious look.

" The building of Socialism," the flaxen-haired one said at last, squeezing the words out of himself, " the building of Socialism is our maximum programme. We must first of all lay

the foundations by means of our Brotherly Circles."

"I see. So you mean—afterwards," said I. "Well, if it's afterwards, it's afterwards."

At that moment the door opened, and a big fat lady came into the room.

"Young Brothers," said she in a sing-song voice, "the Master will improvise to you presently. You can go gently into the general hall and listen to him there."

"Riabtsov," Volodya Shahov whispered, "please don't make a row there. Please don't. Nobody's asking you to attend the meeting. If you want to make a row, we had better go away."

"I have no intention of making a row," said I peevishly. "What's making you think so?"

It amused me to think that Shahov, who was much older than I, and who had perhaps even been a White Officer, spoke to me as appealingly as Yushka Gromov used to do whenever I took him by the scruff of the neck.

There was a large crowd in the general hall, and a man with a big black beard was standing in front of a perfectly blank wall. ("The Master," I thought.) There was a solemn silence in the room. When we sat down, there was a strange sound—like a bell or a gong or like the signal at the theatre before the curtain goes up.

"Give thy soul for thy neighbour!" the fat

lady suddenly exclaimed in a hysterical voice. " Master, we are awaiting your revelation on the promised subject."

The Master puffed out his chest and, stepping forward, began slowly to utter the verses of some poem of how a Silver Knight, attacked by a horde of Saracens, blew his horn, and how a shepherd who heard the sound threw himself unarmed into the thick of the battle and perished with the Knight.

" Listen to him, Riabtsov," Shahov whispered ; " he is improvising. It has been proved over and over again that he doesn't write poetry. These verses just come into his head."

" He's a liar," said I. " I'm sure he wrote them down before he came here."

The man with the beard continued in a holy whisper :

" The sound of the horn . . . was lost again,
And died with . . . the setting sun,
And no one saw . . . how the Silver Knight,
And the shepherd . . . were undone.
The foaming steed . . . it galloped away,
And, like a soul in pain,
The evening wind sang the funeral dirge
To the Knight and the Shepherd swain."

I rather liked the verses, but I couldn't quite see what sense there was in the shepherd jumping into the thick of the battle—for he couldn't be of any use, anyway. The only possible

excuse would have been if he had wanted to divert the enemies' attention from the Knight.

It occurred to me that my shepherd friend, Finagent, would never have acted in that way in the circumstances, but would have started throwing bricks at the Knight's enemies. And Vera—Vera would have called a meeting of the nearest soviet.

There was no clapping after the recitation. The fat lady declared that the Master was feeling weary, and everyone got up to go away. I went out with Pashka Brychev.

" Whatever has brought *you* here ? " I asked.

" It's—you see, we've discussed it at the Unit, and they told me to give them a report on the proceedings. But I say, Kostya, what are they ?—looking for a god, or what ? "

" I'm damned if I know," said I. " It's hard to make head or tail of it, at first."

" Are you sure there's no counter[1] about it ? Eh, Kostya ? "

" Perhaps there is—I don't know. If we come here often enough, we'll find out all right."

I don't think there's any very clear counter about it, but, in any case, I've started working out a very clear plan in my own mind.

January 18 :

Never yet have I written my diary in such bourgeois surroundings : an electric lamp with

[1] Counter-Revolution.

a green shade is standing on my table, there's a carpet on the floor, and pictures on the walls, and, on one side, a huge sofa on which I sleep. Needless to say, the room doesn't belong to me, but to my First Brother, Mili Stepanych Ladanov. But I've settled down here, and, as I've been registered at this address, my stay here is quite legal—not like my stay at Vanka's or Korsuntsev's hostels. I got his address at the Brothers' meeting, and came along the next day to tell him that I had nowhere to live. After some hesitation, he offered to put me up, and I didn't take long to agree.

This Mili fellow is either a nepman or a speculator ; he hasn't any regular job, but he always has plenty of money. When he learned that I was a Young Communist, he seemed quite delighted ; but I don't know what he's up to. He asked me to dine with him, but I refused : living in a place is one thing, but dining is quite another.

Mili and I have long arguments every evening about materialism, Christianity, humanitarianism, etc. He always pretends to yield to my arguments, though, at bottom, I know he doesn't. I am quite sure that he doesn't care a damn about Socialism, whether as a maximum or as a minimum programme. But, then, he seems to be pleased enough with the present, and doesn't bother about the future at all.

He and I went to the meeting of the Younger

Brothers ; Pashka Brychev wasn't there for some reason. The meeting was extremely dull, and I am still wondering whether I should report all this nonsense to the Unit.

January 20 :

I've just had a terrible row with my First Brother, and told him I would push his face in. He threatened to refer me to the meeting of the Younger Brothers. I said I sneezed at his meeting.

I'm afraid I was a bit early in doing it ; but, well, it can't be helped now. On the other hand, I have analysed my feelings, and I know that she is the cause of it all.

I haven't told anyone about it, and I am not even writing anything about it here. It is all very depressing, but I must try and pull myself together.

I keep working hard and going to lectures, but I miss most of it, and the words in books seem all blurred and confused.

This love for a girl is quite idiotic—it's something like that damned " love thy neighbour " business.

January 27 :

Now I can see what " love thy neighbour " means. Mili has lodged a complaint with the

People's Court and wants me evicted. I have been asked three times to the meeting of the Younger Brothers—but I didn't go. To hell with them ! I spend most of my time at the library, reading lots of books and taking notes showing what a harmful thing love is in life.

I had to knock at the door for a whole hour yesterday before I got in. In the end a next-door neighbour opened the door. No, he can't catch me this way !

January 29 :

I have got over it a little, and I shall try to describe what happened on the 19th of January. I shall remember that day as long as I live, because on that day I realised the fallacy of a passive and contemplative existence. Here's the story.

I was all alone in my room—my First Brother had gone out—when suddenly the bell rang. The landlady (she's a bitch, too) poked her head into the room and said someone had come to see me. I went out into the hall—and there was Sylva.

" How did you manage to find me ? " said I, overwhelmed with joy.

" I just went to see Vanka and asked him."

She sat down on the sofa and looked at me with sparkling eyes.

" Why are you looking so happy ? " said I.

" I'll tell you in a minute. You know, I've never felt as cheerful as I do now."

" Why, what's happened ? "

" If you are even the least bit of a friend, you will be cheerful as well," said she. " And you mustn't get annoyed about it."

" Annoyed about what ? "

She stood up, walked round the room, and said, " What would you say if I got married ? "

I imagined it for a second : A big fat man with a beard (why with a beard I don't know) and Sylva kissing his bald head. It was both funny and disgusting.

" I don't know," said I, " but you and marriage don't seem to go together. Why the hell would you get married, anyway ? "

" You know, it's all very well talking about independence. But we women seem to be made in some curious way—we need something to dissolve ourselves in. But don't imagine for a moment," said she, sitting down beside me, " that I am giving up all my ideas of emancipation. That goes without saying. I shall always go on fighting for the complete independence of women. I couldn't stand the thought of being a slave or a mere *female*. I shan't lay down my banner," said she, striking her knee with her fist. " This isn't an atmosphere where a woman can choke. That's what George said——"

Sylva got up. The moment she mentioned George my heart dropped.

"Well, you see, George went to a place called Uzbekistan last summer. There's an ancient temple there, and it stands on a hill of pale-blue rocks—it must look very fine. And high, high up on those rocks there is a statue of Lenin. And on the first of May they all celebrate the Revolution. Those Uzbek people wear brightly coloured robes, but the women still walk about like corpses, wearing black veils over their faces ; and the veils are made of horses' hair, so that they can hardly breathe through them. At night they light a huge bonfire in front of the Lenin monument—you can imagine the big red flames lighting up the blue rocks below and the shadow of Lenin up above. And huge crowds gather round the bonfire, and suddenly at midnight, without any warning, the women begin to tear off their veils and throw them into the fire. It's enough for one of them to do it, and hundreds and hundreds of the others do it, too. This is followed by a great threatening howl from the men ; but nothing can stop the women ; the women tear off their veils in a kind of ecstasy and fling them into the flames. The old women weep ; the men threaten them ; but they don't mind. Do you know, Vladlen, I can understand that feeling of ecstasy, for, apart from the inconvenience of wearing a veil, it is the symbol of slavery and submission. Of course, a few days after they are made to put on the veils again, but the same thing happens at

the next revolutionary feast. There's a kind of majestic process of female liberation, a powerful mass protest. They may kill the women, but the veils still go flying into the fire below Lenin's monument. . . . I'm afraid I've got too eloquent."

" Hm !—yes," said I gloomily. " Did George tell you all that ? "

" Why have you always something against George, Vladlen, my dear ? " said Sylva, sitting down beside me, and stroking my hair, which sent an electric shiver through me. " George is a good boy—tell me, isn't he, my darling? Tell me he's a good boy, won't you ? "

" I'm sure I don't know what kind he is," said I peevishly. " But every time I see you now you've got only one topic of conversation—Stremglavsky. Can't you talk of something else for a change ? "

" I must tell you everything," said she softly. " George and I have got married."

For a moment I felt as though a huge, black, slimy beast had got on top of me and had pressed me to the ground with its big fat belly.

" Why won't you say anything, Vladlen, dear ? " said she, stroking my hair. " I couldn't —help it. Of course, I'm wrong not to have consulted you first. After all, you were my closest comrade—we went through school together. But George—George is different. He is so active, so energetic—breathing fire. I couldn't

—couldn't resist him when he proposed it. I stop being my own self in his presence."

"Do you mean that I am not active?" said I.

"You seem to have changed a lot since we left school. I don't know—— At bottom you must have remained the same, but something seems to have happened to you—I don't know what it is."

"You know perfectly well," said I angrily, "my father died, I had to sleep in the street, and even now I really haven't a room of my own. You know quite well—better than anyone —how hard it's been for me. And, instead of waiting, you——"

"What was I to wait for?"

"You know quite well. Why should I explain?"

"Of course, you must explain—for I don't understand," said she excitedly, "and you'll be a pig if you don't explain. What should I have waited for?"

I suddenly realised what a blunder I had made. For had we *ever*, once, said anything really important to one another? I had a sudden feeling of emptiness, and for no apparent reason I began to curse. It makes me ashamed to think of all the things I said to Sylva then.

She listened to me patiently, and then asked:

"Still, what did you want me to wait for?"

" Well, I thought you—would marry—me."

" Did you ever mention it before ? " she said promptly. " I may as well tell you now—I was up to my ears in love with you, but then—you always kept hanging round Lena and Black Zoya, and gave them far more attention than you ever gave me, and besides, how was I to know, anyway? You wrote that poem for Black Zoya, not for me——"

" The poem was for you, and not for Zoya."

" How could I know ? You read it to her first. But, anyway—it's too late to discuss it now. It's really been your own fault—and I couldn't do anything else. Although it's a vulgar word, I may as well tell you that I love George Stremglavsky, and can't do without him."

" All right then. Chuck it."

I don't remember how she left. But I've been busy ever since analysing myself—and that's why I haven't written about it sooner. It's important to look at one's self objectively. With Sylva, something big and bright and important has gone out of my life. Why ? I've asked myself a thousand times. There are thousands of girls who are better than Sylva, but Sylva has been my most intimate friend—and I have let her slip away.

It only occurred to me this morning that she dropped me because, for some reason, I had lost something of my former energy and activity and had become absorbed in the enormous

University community. It's no good. I've got to pull myself together. Life has been rushing past me, while I've just kept on contemplating myself in my diary. What's wanted is action, not contemplation. One's got to put up a fight—and it's no good getting excited over little things like having or not having a room to live in.

To hell with that—it's Life that must be conquered !

To hell with degenerate reflections !

I must work, and keep a control over myself and the life around me ; I must be constructive, not contemplative. Pushkin's Dubrovsky became a robber chief when Masha told him she had married Prince Vereisky. But he did it because he had no other outlet for his energy.

But there is an outlet for mine :

Science. Socialism. Struggle.

January 30 :

Yesterday the People's Court dismissed my First Brother's application to have me evicted. The point is that I have already been officially registered at this address, and so they can't do anything about it. After several insistent " invitations " I went to the Younger Brothers' meeting to-day, and decided to act as though I were submitting to their authority.

They all looked very suspiciously at me, and their attitude was positively hostile. " Brother,"

said the flaxen-haired fellow, " we are all under the impression that you have made evil use of the confidence we have placed in you. Will you please explain your conduct."

" Father," said I cheekily, " I can see nothing wrong in my behaviour. It's perfectly simple. I hadn't a room to live in, so my First Brother, Ladanov, offered me a part of his flat. But no sooner had I moved in, than he tried to make me understand that it was only temporary, and wouldn't I be good enough to find another room for myself. Damn it all ! I've been looking for a room for six months, I've had to spend nights in the street, and once I even tried to sleep at a prostitutes' house—what do you expect me to do ? "

" I could tell the very first time I saw him that he went in for those—women," said the little red-nosed sister squeamishly.

" Of course, of course," said I, " I'm an all-round scoundrel. And, being a scoundrel, I declare that I shan't give up my room for anybody's sake, be it a brother, or a mother, or a little sister with a red nose " (she went red all over). " No, the room is mine, and the People's Court decided it yesterday."

" Wait a moment, Brother Riabtsov," said the flaxen-haired one. " It's no good going on in this way. No one is denying you the right to live at Mili's house. We only want to know whether you intend to build up Socialism on

such an inhuman basis as has been revealed by your attitude to your First Brother. Especially as you have declared your desire to advocate the ' love thy neighbour ' doctrine."

" Bunk ! " said I. " There's no such thing as ' love thy neighbour.' And there can't be. You are either fools or hypocrites. What love can there be, when your neighbour tries to cheat you out of something every time he comes near you ? Why am I in Ladanov's way ?—tell me. Is it because he can't bring up females to his house when I am there ?—or what ? A purely materialistic thing. Or would any girl—say this red-nosed sister of ours—get married to anyone simply out of a feeling of brotherly love ? Rubbish ! Even she will try to get a fellow because she's a *woman*, and not because she's a *neighbour*. . . . But what's the good of talking ? "

" In the first place, there is no materialistic or any other reason why you should swear at us," said the flaxen-haired one, hardly able to keep back his anger. " And the best thing would be to put an end to this talk and all our relations altogether. At the same time, it might be of instructive value to the younger members to hear what particular relations you would advocate among people instead of brotherly love. You must realise that such wolf-like relations between people will neither help you to build up Socialism, nor will they help you in your hard struggle for existence."

" What I propose is comradeship," said I. " A relation of comradeship based on mutual interests and common aims. I know that the word *comrade* is inacceptable so far as you are concerned, and there was even an ass who told me that the word didn't exist before the Revolution at all. Yes, comradeship—without any of your sugary ingredients. But if you want any love, then let it be the love not for your neighbour, but for the ones *afar*—for our descendants who will conquer the earth and rule it, not any old way, but in strict accordance with human reason." Not in vain had I spent so much time at the library, for the words came to me freely and easily.

" We've heard that before," said the flaxen-haired one, " but it isn't convincing : you can only love what you can see and feel."

" Christianity tells you," said I, " that you must love a God whom no one has ever felt or seen, and what you are saying is pure materialism. As for me, I love the earth, I love human reason, that greatest motive-power of the universe. I love the human flesh and want it all to flourish and develop. Loving your neighbour is only a hindrance to this general progress—and so to hell with it ! Think of all that's been happening during these past twenty centuries in the name of brotherly love : war and plunder and destruction ; nearly every war was due to some religious cause, and the greatest lover of

his neighbours—General Oliver Cromwell—made a mess of it because he believed in this brotherly love. But it's no good arguing. There was once a whore of an Empress called Catherine the Second who kept saying the same things as you : ' Fellow-citizens, let us cease to be evil.' And yet she let the revolutionaries rot away in jail or in Siberia, and she quartered Pugachov. It's the same here : you love your neighbour only so long as he doesn't affect your materialistic interests. And there were once people called Freemasons who also loved their neighbours, but who flogged their serfs to death —I've read about it myself, so you can't unconvince me. You are their descendants, brothers—the only difference is that you haven't the power that they had in their day. . . . Goodbye, my dear friends, love each other, but see you watch your pockets." When I went out into the cold, I was very sorry I hadn't Sylva there to discuss the whole business with. But somehow I felt sorry with my head, and not with my heart, for a feeling of joy and triumph was throbbing through my whole being. I wish I could continue the struggle—only with a more powerful enemy.

But never mind—there'll be more powerful ones yet.

January 31 :

I got a letter from Nikpetozh, with a blurred postmark which looked like " Totma." That's somewhere in the north. Here is his letter :

" My Dear Kostya,—A vast expanse of snow, and here I am in my sledge, gliding along from village to village. But don't think for a moment that all this snow and spaciousness around me have put me into a lyrical mood ! I haven't time for it ! I've got to think of other things. I've got to ponder carefully over all the numerous questions that the village folks put to me. You and your friend (but tell me—is he really a shepherd ?) have helped me to *find myself* in a world in which I had got lost. You know to what a pass I had come. It was a blind alley without any escape. It's just like us town-dwellers—sitting in a cage and going crazy. We keep forgetting that there is this vast, immense Russia, the rural Russia on whose crest we are living.

" But do you know, Kostya, that rural Russia is something quite different from what we were told both by the official reports and by those who ' whispered the truth ' to you. The Revolution and radio, which the Revolution has brought to the villages, have turned rural Russia upside-down. The peasants patiently carried the parasites on their back, or else they

rioted. That's what we didn't know. But now —now the peasants have learned to *argue*. Instead of speechless submission, or senseless rioting, the village folks argue—some of them for, others against, the Government—but, in any case, they argue ! And arguing means thinking ! And thinking means—growth ! You fellows in the towns can go on developing your industry. If you succeed, the peasants will follow you ; if you fail, you can blame yourselves.

" And, above all, we want more town-people in the villages. And without delay ! For that is the greatest and most urgent need of the villages —they want doctors, and technicians, and vets., and agricultural experts, and there's even a violent demand for people like myself !

" It's late. My temporary landlords are asleep, and a solitary little electric lamp is twinkling on the table before me. . . . Surely that's a miracle ! To think that in a savage, out-of-the-way corner like this (Dark Corners is the name of the place) there can be an electric lamp instead of the usual taper! But they've already become used to their electric light, and that isn't really the important point. . . . I told you I wasn't in a lyrical mood. But that isn't really true. When I see the blue outline of a wood against the snowy horizon, and somewhere in the distance the lights of a factory, and when the little horse pulls the sledge through the deep snow, with the driver and

myself, and mail-bags full of complaints and applications and facts and orders and information and money, I suddenly have a dim vision of my home country, and I sometimes whisper to myself :

" ' Onward, dear Russia, onward ! '

" Strange, isn't it ? On the whole, I'm happy. Good-bye.

" Your friend,

" Nikolai Ozhegov,

" Ring Postman."

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